Pygmalion - Act II

di George Bernard Shaw (1913)

ACT II

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Next day at 11 a.m. Higgins's laboratory in Wimpole Street. It is a room on the first floor, looking on the street, and was meant for the drawing-room. The double doors are in the middle of the back hall; and persons entering find in the corner to their right two tall file cabinets at right angles to one another against the walls. In this corner stands a flat writing-table, on which are a phonograph, a laryngoscope, a row of tiny organ pipes with a bellows, a set of lamp chimneys for singing flames with burners attached to a gas plug in the wall by an indiarubber tube, several tuning-forks of different sizes, a life-size image of half a human head, showing in section the vocal organs, and a box containing a supply of wax cylinders for the phonograph.

Further down the room, on the same side, is a fireplace, with a comfortable leather-covered easy-chair at the side of the hearth nearest the door, and a coal-scuttle. There is a clock on the mantelpiece. Between the fireplace and the phonograph table is a stand for newspapers.

On the other side of the central door, to the left of the visitor, is a cabinet of shallow drawers. On it is a telephone and the telephone directory. The corner beyond, and most of the side wall, is occupied by a grand piano, with the keyboard at the end furthest from the door, and a bench for the player extending the full length of the keyboard. On the piano is a dessert dish heaped with fruit and sweets, mostly chocolates.

The middle of the room is clear. Besides the easy chair, the piano bench, and two chairs at the phonograph table, there is one stray chair. It stands near the fireplace. On the walls, engravings; mostly Piranesis and mezzotint portraits. No paintings.

Pickering is seated at the table, putting down some cards and a tuning-fork which he has been using. Higgins is standing up near him, closing two or three file drawers which are hanging out. He appears in the morning light as a robust, vital, appetizing sort of man of forty or thereabouts, dressed in a professional-looking black frock-coat with a white linen collar and black silk tie. He is of the energetic, scientific type, heartily, even violently interested in everything that can be studied as a scientific subject, and careless about himself and other people, including their feelings. He is, in fact, but for his years and size, rather like a very impetuous baby "taking notice" eagerly and loudly, and requiring almost as much watching to keep him out of unintended mischief. His manner varies from genial bullying when he is in a good humor to stormy petulance when anything goes wrong; but he is so entirely frank and void of malice that he remains likeable even in his least reasonable moments.

HIGGINS: *as he shuts the last drawer* Well, I think that's the whole show.

PICKERING: It's really amazing. I haven't taken half of it in, you know.

HIGGINS: Would you like to go over any of it again?

PICKERING: *rising and coming to the fireplace, where he plants himself with his back to the fire* No, thank you; not now. I'm quite done up for this morning.

HIGGINS: *following him, and standing beside him on his left* Tired of listening to sounds?

PICKERING: Yes. It's a fearful strain. I rather fancied myself because I can pronounce twenty-four distinct vowel sounds; but your hundred and thirty beat me. I can't hear a bit of difference between most of them.

HIGGINS: *chuckling, and going over to the piano to eat sweets* Oh, that comes with practice. You hear

no difference at first; but you keep on listening, and presently you find they're all as different as A from B. *Mrs. Pearce looks in: she is Higgins's housekeeper* What's the matter?

MRS. PEARCE: *hesitating, evidently perplexed* A young woman wants to see you, sir.

HIGGINS: A young woman! What does she want?

MRS. PEARCE: Well, sir, she says you'll be glad to see her when you know what she's come about. She's quite a common girl, sir. Very common indeed. I should have sent her away, only I thought perhaps you wanted her to talk into your machines. I hope I've not done wrong; but really you see such queer people sometimes—You'll excuse me, I'm sure, sir—

HIGGINS: Oh, that's all right, Mrs. Pearce. Has she an interesting accent?

MRS. PEARCE: Oh, something dreadful, sir, really. I don't know how you can take an interest in it.

HIGGINS: *to Pickering* Let's have her up. Show her up, Mrs. Pearce *he rushes across to his working table and picks out a cylinder to use on the phonograph*

MRS. PEARCE: *only half resigned to it* Very well, sir. It's for you to say. *She goes downstairs*

HIGGINS: This is rather a bit of luck. I'll show you how I make records. We'll set her talking; and I'll take it down first in Bell's visible Speech; then in broad Romic; and then we'll get her on the phonograph so that you can turn her on as often as you like with the written transcript before you.

MRS. PEARCE: *returning* This is the young woman, sir.

The flower girl enters in state. She has a hat with three ostrich feathers, orange, sky-blue, and red. She has a nearly clean apron, and the shoddy coat has been tidied a little. The pathos of this deplorable figure, with its innocent vanity and consequential air, touches Pickering, who has already straightened himself in the presence of Mrs. Pearce. But as to Higgins, the only distinction he makes between men and women is that when he is neither bullying nor exclaiming to the heavens against some featherweight cross, he coaxes women as a child coaxes its nurse when it wants to get anything out of her.

HIGGINS: *brusquely, recognizing her with unconcealed disappointment, and at once, baby-like, making an intolerable grievance of it* Why, this is the girl I jotted down last night. She's no use: I've got all the records I want of the Lisson Grove lingo; and I'm not going to waste another cylinder on it. *To the girl* Be off with you: I don't want you.

THE FLOWER GIRL: Don't you be so saucy. You ain't heard what I come for yet. *To Mrs. Pearce, who is waiting at the door for further instruction* Did you tell him I come in a taxi?

MRS. PEARCE: Nonsense, girl! What do you think a gentleman like Mr. Higgins cares what you came in?

THE FLOWER GIRL: Oh, we are proud! He ain't above giving lessons, not him: I heard him say so. Well, I ain't come here to ask for any compliment; and if my money's not good enough I can go elsewhere.

HIGGINS: Good enough for what?

THE FLOWER GIRL: Good enough for ye--oo. Now you know, don't you? I'm come to have lessons, I am. And to pay for em too: make no mistake.

HIGGINS: *stupent* WELL!!! *Recovering his breath with a gasp* What do you expect me to say to you?

THE FLOWER GIRL: Well, if you was a gentleman, you might ask me to sit down, I think. Don't I tell you I'm bringing you business?

HIGGINS: Pickering: shall we ask this baggage to sit down or shall we throw her out of the window?

THE FLOWER GIRL: *running away in terror to the piano, where she turns at bay* Ah--ah--ah--ow--ow--ow--oo! *Wounded and whimpering* I won't be called a baggage when I've offered to pay like any lady.

Motionless, the two men stare at her from the other side of the room, amazed.

PICKERING: *gently* What is it you want, my girl?

THE FLOWER GIRL: I want to be a lady in a flower shop stead of selling at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. But they won't take me unless I can talk more genteel. He said he could teach me. Well, here I am ready to pay him—not asking any favor—and he treats me as if I was dirt.

MRS. PEARCE: How can you be such a foolish ignorant girl as to think you could afford to pay Mr. Higgins?

THE FLOWER GIRL: Why shouldn't I? I know what lessons cost as well as you do; and I'm ready to pay.

HIGGINS: How much?

THE FLOWER GIRL: *coming back to him, triumphant* Now you're talking! I thought you'd come off it when you saw a chance of getting back a bit of what you chucked at me last night. *Confidentially* You'd had a drop in, hadn't you?

HIGGINS: *peremptorily* Sit down.

THE FLOWER GIRL: Oh, if you're going to make a compliment of it—

HIGGINS: *thundering at her* Sit down.

MRS. PEARCE: *severely* Sit down, girl. Do as you're told. *She places the stray chair near the hearthrug between Higgins and Pickering, and stands behind it waiting for the girl to sit down*

THE FLOWER GIRL: Ah—ah—ah—ow—ow—oo! *She stands, half rebellious, half bewildered*

PICKERING: *very courteous* Won't you sit down?

LIZA: *coyly* Don't mind if I do. *She sits down. Pickering returns to the hearthrug*

HIGGINS: What's your name?

THE FLOWER GIRL: Liza Doolittle.

HIGGINS: *declaiming gravely* Eliza, Elizabeth, Betsy and Bess, They went to the woods to get a birds nes':

PICKERING: They found a nest with four eggs in it:

HIGGINS: They took one apiece, and left three in it.

HIGGINS: They laugh heartily at their own wit.

LIZA: Oh, don't be silly.

MRS. PEARCE: You mustn't speak to the gentleman like that.

LIZA: Well, why won't he speak sensible to me?

HIGGINS: Come back to business. How much do you propose to pay me for the lessons?

LIZA: Oh, I know what's right. A lady friend of mine gets French lessons for eighteenpence an hour from a real French gentleman. Well, you wouldn't have the face to ask me the same for teaching me my own language as you would for French; so I won't give more than a shilling. Take it or leave it.

HIGGINS: *walking up and down the room, rattling his keys and his cash in his pockets* You know,

Pickering, if you consider a shilling, not as a simple shilling, but as a percentage of this girl's income, it works out as fully equivalent to sixty or seventy guineas from a millionaire.

PICKERING: How so?

HIGGINS: Figure it out. A millionaire has about 150 pounds a day. She earns about half-a-crown.

LIZA: *haughtily* Who told you I only—

HIGGINS: *continuing* She offers me two-fifths of her day's income for a lesson. Two-fifths of a millionaire's income for a day would be somewhere about 60 pounds. It's handsome. By George,it's enormous! it's the biggest offer I ever had.

LIZA: *rising, terrified* Sixty pounds! What are you talking about? I never offered you sixty pounds. Where would I get—

HIGGINS: Hold your tongue.

LIZA: *weeping* But I ain't got sixty pounds. Oh—

MRS. PEARCE: Don't cry, you silly girl. Sit down. Nobody is going to touch your money.

HIGGINS: Somebody is going to touch you, with a broomstick, if you don't stop snivelling. Sit down.

LIZA: *obeying slowlyAh—ah—ah—ow—oo~~Oh~~ I would think you was my father.*

HIGGINS: If I decide to teach you, I'll be worse than two fathers to you. Here *He offers her his silk handkerchief!*

LIZA: What's this for?

HIGGINS: To wipe your eyes. To wipe any part of your face that feels moist. Remember: That's your handkerchief and that's your sleeve. Don't mistake the one for the other if you wish to become a lady in a shop.

Liza, utterly bewildered, stares helplessly at him.

MRS. PEARCE: It's no use talking to her like that, Mr. Higgins: She doesn't understand you. Besides, you're quite wrong: she doesn't do it that way at all *she takes the handkerchief*

LIZA: *snatching it* Here! You give me that handkerchief. He give it to me, not to you.

PICKERING: *laughing* He did. I think it must be regarded as her property, Mrs. Pearce.

MRS. PEARCE: *resigning herself* Serve you right, Mr. Higgins.

PICKERING: Higgins: I'm interested. What about the ambassador's garden party? I'll say you're the greatest teacher alive if you make that good. I'll bet you all the expenses of the experiment you can't do it. And I'll pay for the lessons.

LIZA: Oh, you are real good. Thank you, Captain.

HIGGINS: *tempted, looking at her* It's almost irresistible. She's so deliciously low—so horribly dirty—

LIZA: *protesting extremely* Ah—ah—ah—ah—ow—ow—oo—I ain't dirty: I washed my face and hands afore I come, I did.

PICKERING: You're certainly not going to turn her head with flattery, Higgins.

MRS. PEARCE: *uneasy* Oh, don't say that, sir: there's more ways than one of turning a girl's head; and nobody can do it better than Mr. Higgins, though he may not always mean it. I do hope, sir, you won't encourage him to do anything foolish.

HIGGINS: *becoming excited as the idea grows on him* What is life but a series of inspired follies? The difficulty is to find them to do. Never lose a chance: It doesn't come every day. I shall make a

duchess of this draggletailed guttersnipe.

LIZA: *strongly deprecating this view of her* Ah—ah—ah—ow—ow—oo!

HIGGINS: *carried away* Yes: in six months—in three if she has a good ear and a quick tongue—I'll take her anywhere and pass her off as anything. We'll start today: now! this moment! Take her away and clean her, Mrs. Pearce. Monkey Brand, if it won't come off any other way. Is there a good fire in the kitchen?

MRS. PEARCE: *protesting* Yes; but--

HIGGINS: *storming on* Take all her clothes off and burn them. Ring up Whiteley or somebody for new ones. Wrap her up in brown paper till they come.

LIZA: You're no gentleman, you're not, to talk of such things. I'm a good girl, I am; and I know what the like of you are, I do.

HIGGINS: We want none of your Lisson Grove prudery here, young woman. You've got to learn to behave like a duchess. Take her away, Mrs. Pearce. If she gives you any trouble wallop her.

LIZA: *springing up and running between Pickering and Mrs. Pearce for protection* No! I'll call the police, I will.

MRS. PEARCE: But I've no place to put her.

HIGGINS: Put her in the dustbin.

LIZA: Ah—ah—ah—ow—ow—oo!

PICKERING: Oh come, Higgins! be reasonable.

MRS. PEARCE: *resolutely* You must be reasonable, Mr. Higgins: Really you must. You can't walk over everybody like this.

Higgins, thus scolded, subsides. The hurricane is succeeded by a zephyr of amiable surprise.

HIGGINS: *with professional exquisiteness of modulation* I walk over everybody! My dear Mrs. Pearce, my dear Pickering, I never had the slightest intention of walking over anyone. All I propose is that we should be kind to this poor girl. We must help her to prepare and fit herself for her new station in life. If I did not express myself clearly it was because I did not wish to hurt her delicacy, or yours.

Liza, reassured, steals back to her chair.

MRS. PEARCE: *to Pickering* Well, did you ever hear anything like that, sir?

PICKERING: *laughing heartily* Never, Mrs. Pearce: never.

HIGGINS: *patiently* What's the matter?

MRS. PEARCE: Well, the matter is, sir, that you can't take a girl up like that as if you were picking up a pebble on the beach.

HIGGINS: Why not?

MRS. PEARCE: Why not! But you don't know anything about her. What about her parents? She may be married.

LIZA: Garn!

HIGGINS: There! As the girl very properly says, Garn! Married indeed! Don't you know that a woman of that class looks a worn out drudge of fifty a year after she's married.

LIZA: Who'd marry me?

HIGGINS: *suddenly resorting to the most thrillingly beautiful low tones in his best elocutionary style* By George, Eliza, the streets will be strewn with the bodies of men shooting themselves for your sake before I've done with you.

MRS. PEARCE: Nonsense, sir. You mustn't talk like that to her.

LIZA: *rising and squaring herself determinedly* I'm going away. He's off his chump, he is. I don't want no balmies teaching me.

HIGGINS: *wounded in his tenderest point by her insensibility to his elocution* Oh, indeed! I'm mad, am I? Very well, Mrs. Pearce: You needn't order the new clothes for her. Throw her out.

LIZA: *whimpering* Nah—ow.You got no right to touch me.

MRS. PEARCE: You see now what comes of being saucy. *Indicating the door* This way, please.

LIZA: *almost in tears* I didn't want no clothes. I wouldn't have taken them *she throws away the handkerchief* I can buy my own clothes.

HIGGINS: *deftly retrieving the handkerchief and intercepting her on her reluctant way to the door* You're an ungrateful wicked girl. This is my return for offering to take you out of the gutter and dress you beautifully and make a lady of you.

MRS. PEARCE: Stop, Mr. Higgins. I won't allow it. It's you that are wicked. Go home to your parents, girl; and tell them to take better care of you.

LIZA: I ain't got no parents. They told me I was big enough to earn my own living and turned me out.

MRS. PEARCE: Where's your mother?

LIZA: I ain't got no mother. Her that turned me out was my sixth stepmother. But I done without them. And I'm a good girl, I am.

HIGGINS: Very well, then, what on earth is all this fuss about? The girl doesn't belong to anybody—is no use to anybody but me. *He goes to Mrs. Pearce and begins coaxing* You can adopt her, Mrs. Pearce: I'm sure a daughter would be a great amusement to you. Now don't make any more fuss. Take her downstairs; and—

MRS. PEARCE: But what's to become of her? Is she to be paid anything? Do be sensible, sir.

HIGGINS: Oh, pay her whatever is necessary: Put it down in the housekeeping book. *Impatiently* What on earth will she want with money? She'll have her food and her clothes. She'll only drink if you give her money.

LIZA: *turning on him* Oh you are a brute. It's a lie: nobody ever saw the sign of liquor on me. *She goes back to her chair and plants herself there defiantly*

PICKERING: *in good-humored remonstrance* Does it occur to you, Higgins, that the girl has some feelings?

HIGGINS: *looking critically at her* Oh no, I don't think so. Not any feelings that we need bother about. *Cheerily* Have you, Eliza?

LIZA: I got my feelings same as anyone else.

HIGGINS: *to Pickering, reflectively* You see the difficulty?

PICKERING: Eh? What difficulty?

HIGGINS: To get her to talk grammar. The mere pronunciation is easy enough.

LIZA: I don't want to talk grammar. I want to talk like a lady.

MRS. PEARCE: Will you please keep to the point, Mr. Higgins. I want to know on what terms the girl is to be here. Is she to have any wages? And what is to become of her when you've finished your teaching? You must look ahead a little.

HIGGINS: *impatiently* What's to become of her if I leave her in the gutter? Tell me that, Mrs. Pearce.

MRS. PEARCE: That's her own business, not yours, Mr. Higgins.

HIGGINS: Well, when I've done with her, we can throw her back into the gutter; and then it will be her own business again; so that's all right.

LIZA: Oh, you've no feeling heart in you: you don't care for nothing but yourself *she rises and takes the floor resolutely.* Here! I've had enough of this. I'm going *making for the door.* You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you ought.

HIGGINS: *snatching a chocolate cream from the piano, his eyes suddenly beginning to twinkle with mischief* Have some chocolates, Eliza.

LIZA: *halting, tempted* How do I know what might be in them? I've heard of girls being drugged by the like of you.

Higgins whips out his penknife; cuts a chocolate in two; puts one half into his mouth and bolts it; and offers her the other half.

HIGGINS: Pledge of good faith, Eliza. I eat one half you eat the other.

Liza opens her mouth to retort: he pops the half chocolate into it. You shall have boxes of them, barrels of them, every day. You shall live on them. Eh?

LIZA: *who has disposed of the chocolate after being nearly choked by it* I wouldn't have ate it, only I'm too ladylike to take it out of my mouth.

HIGGINS: Listen, Eliza. I think you said you came in a taxi.

LIZA: Well, what if I did? I've as good a right to take a taxi as anyone else.

HIGGINS: You have, Eliza; and in future you shall have as many taxis as you want. You shall go up and down and round the town in a taxi every day. Think of that, Eliza.

MRS. PEARCE: Mr. Higgins: you're tempting the girl. It's not right. She should think of the future.

HIGGINS: At her age! Nonsense! Time enough to think of the future when you haven't any future to think of. No, Eliza: do as this lady does: think of other people's futures; but never think of your own. Think of chocolates, and taxis, and gold, and diamonds.

LIZA: No: I don't want no gold and no diamonds. I'm a good girl, I am. *She sits down again, with an attempt at dignity*

HIGGINS: You shall remain so, Eliza, under the care of Mrs Pearce. And you shall marry an officer in the Guards, with a beautiful moustache: the son of a marquis, who will disinherit him for marrying you, but will relent when he sees your beauty and goodness—

PICKERING: Excuse me, Higgins; but I really must interfere. Mrs Pearce is quite right. If this girl is to put herself in your hands for six months for an experiment in teaching, she must understand thoroughly what she's doing.

HIGGINS: How can she? She's incapable of understanding anything. Besides, do any of us understand what we are doing? If we did, would we ever do it?

PICKERING: Very clever, Higgins; but not sound sense. *To Eliza* Miss Doolittle—

LIZA: *overwhelmed* Ah—ah—ow—oo!

HIGGINS: There! That's all you get out of Eliza. Ah—ah—ow—no use explaining. As a military man you ought to know that. Give her her orders: That's what she wants. Eliza: you are to live here for the next six months, learning how to speak beautifully, like a lady in a florist's shop. If you're good and do whatever you're told, you shall sleep in a proper bedroom, and have lots to eat, and money to buy chocolates and take rides in taxis. If you're naughty and idle you will sleep in the back kitchen among the black beetles, and be walloped by Mrs. Pearce with a broomstick. At the end of six months you shall go to Buckingham Palace in a carriage, beautifully dressed. If the King finds out you're not a lady, you will be taken by the police to the Tower of London, where your head will be cut off as a warning to other presumptuous flower girls. If you are not found out, you shall have a present of seven-and-sixpence to start life with as a lady in a shop. If you refuse this offer you will be a most ungrateful and wicked girl; and the angels will weep for you. *To Pickering* Now are you satisfied, Pickering? *To Mrs Pearce* Can I put it more plainly and fairly, Mrs Pearce?

MRS. PEARCE: *patiently* I think you'd better let me speak to the girl properly in private. I don't know that I can take charge of her or consent to the arrangement at all. Of course I know you don't mean her any harm; but when you get what you call interested in people's accents, you never think or care what may happen to them or you. Come with me, Eliza.

HIGGINS: That's all right. Thank you, Mrs. Pearce. Bundle her off to the bath-room.

LIZA: *rising reluctantly and suspiciously* You're a great bully, you are. I won't stay here if I don't like. I won't let nobody wallop me. I never asked to go to Bucknam Palace, I didn't. I was never in trouble with the police, not me. I'm a good girl—

MRS. PEARCE: Don't answer back, girl. You don't understand the gentleman. Come with me. *She leads the way to the door, and holds it open for Eliza*

LIZA: *as she goes out* Well, what I say is right. I won't go near the king, not if I'm going to have my head cut off. If I'd known what I was letting myself in for, I wouldn't have come here. I always been a good girl; and I never offered to say a word to him; and I don't owe him nothing; and I don't care; and I won't be put upon; and I have my feelings the same as anyone else—

Mrs Pearce shuts the door; and Eliza's plaints are no longer audible.

Eliza is taken upstairs to the third floor greatly to her surprise; for she expected to be taken down to the scullery. There Mrs. Pearce opens a door and takes her into a spare bedroom.

MRS. PEARCE: I will have to put you here. This will be your bedroom.

LIZA: O–h, I couldn't sleep here, missus. It's too good for the likes of me. I should be afraid to touch anything. I aint a duchess yet, you know.

MRS. PEARCE: You have got to make yourself as clean as the room: Then you wont be afraid of it. And you must call me Mrs Pearce, not missus. *She throws open the door of the dressingroom, now modernized as a bathroom*

LIZA: Gawd! whats this? Is this where you wash clothes? Funny sort of copper I call it.

MRS. PEARCE: It is not a copper. This is where we wash ourselves, Eliza, and where I am going to wash you.

LIZA: You expect me to get into that and wet myself all over! Not me. I should catch my death. I knew a woman did it every Saturday night; and she died of it.

MRS. PEARCE: Mr Higgins has the gentlemen's bathroom downstairs; and he has a bath every morning, in cold water.

LIZA: Ugh! He's made of iron, that man.

MRS. PEARCE: If you are to sit with him and the Colonel and be taught you will have to do the same.

They wont like the smell of you if you don't. But you can have the water as hot as you like. There are two taps: hot and cold.

LIZA: *weeping* I couldnt. I dursnt. Its not natural: It would kill me. I've never had a bath in my life: Not what youd call a proper one.

MRS. PEARCE: Well, dont you want to be clean and sweet and decent, like a lady? You know you cant be a nice girl inside if youre a dirty slut outside.

LIZA: Boohoo!!!!

MRS. PEARCE: Now stop crying and go back into your room and take off all your clothes. Then wrap yourself in this *Taking down a gown from its peg and handing it to her* and come back to me. I will get the bath ready.

LIZA: *all tears* I cant. I wont. I'm not used to it. Ive never took off all my clothes before. It's not right: It's not decent.

MRS. PEARCE: Nonsense, child. Dont you take off all your clothes every night when you go to bed?

LIZA: *amazed* No. Why should I? I should catch my death. Of course I take off my skirt.

MRS. PEARCE: Do you mean that you sleep in the underclothes you wear in the daytime?

LIZA: What else have I to sleep in?

MRS. PEARCE: You will never do that again as long as you live here. I will get you a proper nightdress.

LIZA: Do you mean change into cold things and lie awake shivering half the night? You want to kill me, you do.

MRS. PEARCE: I want to change you from a frowzy slut to a clean respectable girl fit to sit with the gentlemen in the study. Are you going to trust me and do what I tell you or be thrown out and sent back to your flower basket?

LIZA: But you dont know what the cold is to me. You dont know how I dread it.

MRS. PEARCE: Your bed won't be cold here: I will put a hot water bottle into it. *Pushing her into the bedroom* Off with you and undress.

LIZA: Oh, if only I'd known what a dreadful thing it is to be clean I'd never have come. I didnt know when I was well off. I—[Mrs Pearce pushes her through the door, but leaves it partly open lest her prisoner should take to flight]

MRS PEARCE puts on a pair of white rubber sleeves, and fills the bath, mixing hot and cold, and testing the result with the bath thermometer. She perfumes it with a handful of bath salts and adds a palmful of mustard. She then takes a formidable looking long handled scrubbing brush and soaps it profusely with a ball of scented soap.

ELIZA comes back with nothing on but the bath gown huddled tightly round her, a piteous spectacle of abject terror.

MRS. PEARCE: Now come along. Take that thing off.

LIZA: Oh I couldnt, Mrs Pearce: I reely couldnt. I never done such a thing.

MRS. PEARCE: Nonsense. Here: Step in and tell me whether its hot enough for you.

LIZA: Ah–oo! Ah–oo! It's too hot.

MRS. PEARCE: *deftly snatching the gown away and throwing Eliza down on her back.* It wont hurt you. *She sets to work with the scrubbing brush.*

Eliza's screams are heartrending.

PICKERING: Excuse the straight question, Higgins. Are you a man of good character where women are concerned?

HIGGINS: *moodily* Have you ever met a man of good character where women are concerned?

PICKERING: Yes: Very frequently.

HIGGINS: *dogmatically, lifting himself on his hands to the level of the piano, and sitting on it with a bounce* Well, I haven't. I find that the moment I let a woman make friends with me, she becomes jealous, exacting, suspicious, and a damned nuisance. I find that the moment I let myself make friends with a woman, I become selfish and tyrannical. Women upset everything. When you let them into your life, you find that the woman is driving at one thing and you're driving at another.

PICKERING: At what, for example?

HIGGINS: *coming off the piano restlessly* Oh, Lord knows! I suppose the woman wants to live her own life; and the man wants to live his; and each tries to drag the other on to the wrong track. One wants to go north and the other south; and the result is that both have to go east, though they both hate the east wind. *He sits down on the bench at the keyboard.* So here I am, a confirmed old bachelor, and likely to remain so.

PICKERING: *rising and standing over him gravely* Come, Higgins! You know what I mean. If I'm to be in this business I shall feel responsible for that girl. I hope it's understood that no advantage is to be taken of her position.

HIGGINS: What! That thing! Sacred, I assure you. *Rising to explain* You see, she'll be a pupil; and teaching would be impossible unless pupils were sacred. I've taught scores of American millionairesses how to speak English: the best looking women in the world. I'm seasoned. They might as well be blocks of wood. I might as well be a block of wood. It's—

Mrs. Pearce opens the door. She has Eliza's hat in her hand. Pickering retires to the easy-chair at the hearth and sits down.

HIGGINS: *eagerly* Well, Mrs. Pearce: Is it all right?

MRS. PEARCE: *at the door* I just wish to trouble you with a word, if I may, Mr. Higgins.

HIGGINS: Yes, certainly. Come in. *She comes forward.* Don't burn that, Mrs. Pearce. I'll keep it as a curiosity. *He takes the hat.*

MRS. PEARCE: Handle it carefully, sir, please. I had to promise her not to burn it; but I had better put it in the oven for a while.

HIGGINS: *putting it down hastily on the piano* Oh! thank you. Well, what have you to say to me?

PICKERING: Am I in the way?

MRS. PEARCE: Not at all, sir. Mr. Higgins: Will you please be very particular what you say before the girl?

HIGGINS: *sternly* Of course. I'm always particular about what I say. Why do you say this to me?

MRS. PEARCE: *unmoved* No, sir: You're not at all particular when you've mislaid anything or when you get a little impatient. Now it doesn't matter before me: I'm used to it. But you really must not swear before the girl.

HIGGINS: *indignantly* I swear! *Most emphatically* I never swear. I detest the habit. What the devil do you mean?

MRS. PEARCE: *stolidly* That's what I mean, sir. You swear a great deal too much. I don't mind your damning and blasting, and what the devil and where the devil and who the devil—

HIGGINS: Really! Mrs. Pearce: This language from your lips!

MRS. PEARCE: *not to be put off—but there is a certain word I must ask you not to use. The girl has just used it herself because the bath was too hot. It begins with the same letter as bath. She knows no better: she learnt it at her mother's knee. But she must not hear it from your lips.*

HIGGINS: *loftily* I cannot charge myself with having ever uttered it, Mrs. Pearce. *She looks at him steadfastly. He adds, hiding an uneasy conscience with a judicial air* Except perhaps in a moment of extreme and justifiable excitement.

MRS. PEARCE: Only this morning, sir, you applied it to your boots, to the butter, and to the brown bread.

HIGGINS: Oh, that! Mere alliteration, Mrs. Pearce, natural to a poet.

MRS. PEARCE: Well, sir, whatever you choose to call it, I beg you not to let the girl hear you repeat it.

HIGGINS: Oh, very well, very well. Is that all?

MRS. PEARCE: No, sir. We shall have to be very particular with this girl as to personal cleanliness.

HIGGINS: Certainly. Quite right. Most important.

MRS. PEARCE: I mean not to be slovenly about her dress or untidy in leaving things about.

HIGGINS: *going to her solemnly* Just so. I intended to call your attention to that *He passes on to Pickering, who is enjoying the conversation immensely* It is these little things that matter, Pickering. Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves is as true of personal habits as of money. *He comes to anchor on the hearthrug, with the air of a man in an unassailable position*

MRS. PEARCE: Yes, sir. Then might I ask you not to come down to breakfast in your dressing-gown, or at any rate not to use it as a napkin to the extent you do, sir. And if you would be so good as not to eat everything off the same plate, and to remember not to put the porridge saucepan out of your hand on the clean tablecloth, it would be a better example to the girl. You know you nearly choked yourself with a fishbone in the jam only last week.

HIGGINS: *routed from the hearthrug and drifting back to the piano* I may do these things sometimes in absence of mind; but surely I don't do them habitually. *Angrily* By the way: my dressing-gown smells most damnably of benzine.

MRS. PEARCE: No doubt it does, Mr. Higgins. But if you will wipe your fingers—

HIGGINS: *yelling* Oh very well, very well: I'll wipe them in my hair in future.

MRS. PEARCE: I hope you're not offended, Mr. Higgins.

HIGGINS: *shocked at finding himself thought capable of an unamiable sentiment* Not at all, not at all. You're quite right, Mrs. Pearce: I shall be particularly careful before the girl. Is that all?

MRS. PEARCE: No, sir. Might she use some of those Japanese dresses you brought from abroad? I really can't put her back into her old things.

HIGGINS: Certainly. Anything you like. Is that all?

MRS. PEARCE: Thank you, sir. That's all. *She goes out.*

HIGGINS: You know, Pickering, that woman has the most extraordinary ideas about me. Here I am, a shy, diffident sort of man. I've never been able to feel really grown-up and tremendous, like other chaps. And yet she's firmly persuaded that I'm an arbitrary overbearing bossing kind of person. I can't account for it.

Mrs Pearce returns.

MRS. PEARCE: If you please, sir, the trouble's beginning already. There's a dustman downstairs, Alfred Doolittle, wants to see you. He says you have his daughter here.

PICKERING: *rising* Phew! I say! *He retreats to the hearthrug*

HIGGINS: *promptly* Send the blackguard up.

MRS. PEARCE: Oh, very well, sir. *She goes out.*

PICKERING: He may not be a blackguard, Higgins.

HIGGINS: Nonsense. Of course he's a blackguard.

PICKERING: Whether he is or not, I'm afraid we shall have some trouble with him.

HIGGINS: *confidently* Oh no: I think not. If there's any trouble he shall have it with me, not I with him. And we are sure to get something interesting out of him.

PICKERING: About the girl?

HIGGINS: No. I mean his dialect.

PICKERING: Oh!

MRS. PEARCE: *at the door* Doolittle, sir. *She admits Doolittle and retires.*

Alfred Doolittle is an elderly but vigorous dustman, clad in the costume of his profession, including a hat with a back brim covering his neck and shoulders. He has well marked and rather interesting features, and seems equally free from fear and conscience. He has a remarkably expressive voice, the result of a habit of giving vent to his feelings without reserve. His present pose is that of wounded honor and stern resolution.

DOOLITTLE: *at the door, uncertain which of the two gentlemen is his man* Professor Higgins?

HIGGINS: Here. Good morning. Sit down.

DOOLITTLE: Morning, Governor. *He sits down magisterially* I come about a very serious matter, Governor.

HIGGINS: *to Pickering* Brought up in Hounslow. Mother Welsh, I should think. *Doolittle opens his mouth, amazed. Higgins continues* What do you want, Doolittle?

DOOLITTLE: *menacingly* I want my daughter: That's what I want. See?

HIGGINS: Of course you do. You're her father, aren't you? You don't suppose anyone else wants her, do you? I'm glad to see you have some spark of family feeling left. She's upstairs. Take her away at once.

DOOLITTLE: *rising, fearfully taken aback* What!

HIGGINS: Take her away. Do you suppose I'm going to keep your daughter for you?

DOOLITTLE: *remonstrating* Now, now, look here, Governor. Is this reasonable? Is it fair to take advantage of a man like this? The girl belongs to me. You got her. Where do I come in? *He sits down again*

HIGGINS: Your daughter had the audacity to come to my house and ask me to teach her how to speak properly so that she could get a place in a flower-shop. This gentleman and my housekeeper have been here all the time. *Bullying him* How dare you come here and attempt to blackmail me? You sent her here on purpose.

DOOLITTLE: *protesting* No, Governor.

HIGGINS: You must have. How else could you possibly know that she is here?

DOOLITTLE: Don't take a man up like that, Governor.

HIGGINS: The police shall take you up. This is a plant—a plot to extort money by threats. I shall telephone for the police *he goes resolutely to the telephone and opens the directory.*

DOOLITTLE: Have I asked you for a brass farthing? I leave it to the gentleman here: Have I said a word about money?

HIGGINS: *throwing the book aside and marching down on Doolittle with a poser* What else did you come for?

DOOLITTLE: *sweetly* Well, what would a man come for? Be human, governor.

HIGGINS: *disarmed* Alfred: did you put her up to it?

DOOLITTLE: So help me, Governor, I never did. I take my Bible oath I ain't seen the girl these two months past.

HIGGINS: Then how did you know she was here?

DOOLITTLE: *"most musical, most melancholy"* I'll tell you, Governor, if you'll only let me get a word in. I'm willing to tell you. I'm wanting to tell you. I'm waiting to tell you.

HIGGINS: Pickering: This chap has a certain natural gift of rhetoric. Observe the rhythm of his native woodnotes wild. "I'm willing to tell you: I'm wanting to tell you: I'm waiting to tell you." Sentimental rhetoric! That's the Welsh strain in him. It also accounts for his mendacity and dishonesty.

PICKERING: Oh, PLEASE, Higgins: I'm west country myself. *To Doolittle* How did you know the girl was here if you didn't send her?

DOOLITTLE: It was like this, Governor. The girl took a boy in the taxi to give him a jaunt. Son of her landlady, he is. He hung about on the chance of her giving him another ride home. Well, she sent him back for her luggage when she heard you was willing for her to stop here. I met the boy at the corner of Long Acre and Endell Street.

HIGGINS: Public house. Yes?

DOOLITTLE: The poor man's club, Governor: Why shouldn't I?

PICKERING: Do let him tell his story, Higgins.

DOOLITTLE: He told me what was up. And I ask you, what was my feelings and my duty as a father? I says to the boy, "You bring me the luggage," I says—

PICKERING: Why didn't you go for it yourself?

DOOLITTLE: Landlady wouldn't have trusted me with it, Governor. She's that kind of woman: You know. I had to give the boy a penny afore he trusted me with it, the little swine. I brought it to her just to oblige you like, and make myself agreeable. That's all.

HIGGINS: How much luggage?

DOOLITTLE: Musical instrument, Governor. A few pictures, a trifle of jewelry, and a bird-cage. She said she didn't want no clothes. What was I to think from that, Governor? I ask you as a parent what was I to think?

HIGGINS: So you came to rescue her from worse than death, eh?

DOOLITTLE: *appreciatively: relieved at being understood* Just so, Governor. That's right.

PICKERING: But why did you bring her luggage if you intended to take her away?

DOOLITTLE: Have I said a word about taking her away? Have I now?

HIGGINS: *determinedly* You're going to take her away, double quick. *He crosses to the hearth and rings the bell.*

DOOLITTLE: *rising* No, Governor. Don't say that. I'm not the man to stand in my girl's light. Here's a career opening for her, as you might say; and—

Mrs. Pearce opens the door and awaits orders.

HIGGINS: Mrs. Pearce: This is Eliza's father. He has come to take her away. Give her to him. *He goes back to the piano, with an air of washing his hands of the whole affair.*

DOOLITTLE: No. This is a misunderstanding. Listen here—

MRS. PEARCE: He can't take her away, Mr. Higgins: how can he? You told me to burn her clothes.

DOOLITTLE: That's right. I can't carry the girl through the streets like a blooming monkey, can I? I put it to you.

HIGGINS: You have put it to me that you want your daughter. Take your daughter. If she has no clothes go out and buy her some.

DOOLITTLE: *desperate* Where's the clothes she come in? Did I burn them or did your missus here?

MRS. PEARCE: I am the housekeeper, if you please. I have sent for some clothes for your girl. When they come you can take her away. You can wait in the kitchen. This way, please.

Doolittle, much troubled, accompanies her to the door; then hesitates; finally turns confidentially to Higgins.

DOOLITTLE: Listen here, Governor. You and me is men of the world, ain't we?

HIGGINS: Oh! Men of the world, are we? You'd better go, Mrs Pearce.

MRS. PEARCE: I think so, indeed, sir. *She goes, with dignity.*

PICKERING: The floor is yours, Mr. Doolittle.

DOOLITTLE: *to Pickering* I thank you, Governor. *To Higgins, who takes refuge on the piano bench, a little overwhelmed by the proximity of his visitor; for Doolittle has a professional flavor of dust about him.* Well, the truth is, I've taken a sort of fancy to you, Governor; and if you want the girl, I'm not so set on having her back home again but what I might be open to an arrangement. Regarded in the light of a young woman, she's a fine handsome girl. As a daughter she's not worth her keep; and so I tell you straight. All I ask is my rights as a father; and you're the last man alive to expect me to let her go for nothing; for I can see you're one of the straight sort, Governor. Well, what's a five pound note to you? And what's Eliza to me? *He returns to his chair and sits down judicially.*

PICKERING: I think you ought to know, Doolittle, that Mr. Higgins's intentions are entirely honorable.

DOOLITTLE: Course they are, Governor. If I thought they wasn't, I'd ask fifty.

HIGGINS: *revolted* Do you mean to say, you callous rascal, that you would sell your daughter for 50 pounds?

DOOLITTLE: Not in a general way I wouldn't; but to oblige a gentleman like you I'd do a good deal, I do assure you.

PICKERING: Have you no morals, man?

DOOLITTLE: *unabashed* Can't afford them, Governor. Neither could you if you was as poor as me. Not that I mean any harm, you know. But if Liza is going to have a bit out of this, why not me too?

HIGGINS: *troubled* I don't know what to do, Pickering. There can be no question that as a matter of morals it's a positive crime to give this chap a farthing. And yet I feel a sort of rough justice in his claim.

DOOLITTLE: That's it, Governor. That's all I say. A father's heart, as it were.

PICKERING: Well, I know the feeling; but really it seems hardly right--

DOOLITTLE: Don't say that, Governor. Don't look at it that way. What am I, Governors both? I ask you, what am I? I'm one of the undeserving poor: That's what I am. Think of what that means to a man. It means that he's up agen middle class morality all the time. If there's anything going, and I put in for a bit of it, it's always the same story: "You're undeserving; so you can't have it." But my needs is as great as the most deserving widow's that ever got money out of six different charities in one week for the death of the same husband. I don't need less than a deserving man: I need more. I don't eat less hearty than him; and I drink a lot more. I want a bit of amusement, cause I'm a thinking man. I want cheerfulness and a song and a band when I feel low. Well, they charge me just the same for everything as they charge the deserving. What is middle class morality? Just an excuse for never giving me anything. Therefore, I ask you, as two gentlemen, not to play that game on me. I'm playing straight with you. I ain't pretending to be deserving. I'm undeserving; and I mean to go on being undeserving. I like it; and that's the truth. Will you take advantage of a man's nature to do him out of the price of his own daughter what he's brought up and fed and clothed by the sweat of his brow until she's growed big enough to be interesting to you two gentlemen? Is five pounds unreasonable? I put it to you; and I leave it to you.

HIGGINS: *rising, and going over to Pickering* Pickering: if we were to take this man in hand for three months, he could choose between a seat in the Cabinet and a popular pulpit in Wales.

PICKERING: What do you say to that, Doolittle?

DOOLITTLE: Not me, Governor, thank you kindly. I've heard all the preachers and all the prime ministers—for I'm a thinking man and game for politics or religion or social reform same as all the other amusements—and I tell you it's a dog's life anyway you look at it. Undeserving poverty is my line. Taking one station in society with another, it's—it's—well it's the only one that has any ginger in it, to my taste.

HIGGINS: I suppose we must give him a fiver.

PICKERING: He'll make a bad use of it, I'm afraid.

DOOLITTLE: Not me, Governor, so help me I won't. Don't you be afraid that I'll save it and spare it and live idle on it. There won't be a penny of it left by Monday: I'll have to go to work same as if I'd never had it. It won't pauperize me, you bet. Just one good spree for myself and the missus, giving pleasure to ourselves and employment to others, and satisfaction to you to think it's not been throwed away. You couldn't spend it better.

HIGGINS: *taking out his pocket book and coming between Doolittle and the piano* This is irresistible. Let's give him ten. *He offers two notes to the dustman.*

DOOLITTLE: No, Governor. She wouldn't have the heart to spend ten; and perhaps I shouldn't neither. Ten pounds is a lot of money: it makes a man feel prudent like; and then goodbye to happiness. You give me what I ask you, Governor: not a penny more, and not a penny less.

PICKERING: Why don't you marry that missus of yours? I rather draw the line at encouraging that sort of immorality.

DOOLITTLE: Tell her so, Governor: Tell her so. I'm willing. It's me that suffers by it. I've no hold on her. I got to be agreeable to her. I got to give her presents. I got to buy her clothes something sinful. I'm a slave to that woman, Governor, just because I'm not her lawful husband. And she knows it

too. Catch her marrying me! Take my advice, Governor: marry Eliza while she's young and don't know no better. If you don't you'll be sorry for it after. If you do, she'll be sorry for it after; but better you than her, because you're a man, and she's only a woman and don't know how to be happy anyhow.

HIGGINS: Pickering: if we listen to this man another minute, we shall have no convictions left. *To Doolittle* Five pounds I think you said.

DOOLITTLE: Thank you kindly, Governor.

HIGGINS: You're sure you won't take ten?

DOOLITTLE: Not now. Another time, Governor.

HIGGINS: *handing him a five-pound note* Here you are.

DOOLITTLE: Thank you, Governor. Good morning.

He hurries to the door, anxious to get away with his booty. When he opens it he is confronted with a dainty and exquisitely clean young Japanese lady in a simple blue cotton kimono printed cunningly with small white jasmine blossoms. Mrs. Pearce is with her. He gets out of her way deferentially and apologizes. Beg pardon, miss.

DOOLITTLE: THE JAPANESE LADY Garn! Don't you know your own daughter?

DOOLITTLE: *Exclaiming simultaneously* – DOOLITTLE: Bly me! it's Eliza! HIGGINS: What's that! This! PICKERING: By Jove!

LIZA: Don't I look silly?

HIGGINS: Silly?

MRS. PEARCE: *at the door* Now, Mr. Higgins, please don't say anything to make the girl conceited about herself.

HIGGINS: *conscientiously* Oh! Quite right, Mrs. Pearce. *To Eliza* Yes: damned silly.

MRS. PEARCE: Please, sir.

HIGGINS: *correcting himself* I mean extremely silly.

LIZA: I should look all right with my hat on. *She takes up her hat; puts it on; and walks across the room to the fireplace with a fashionable air.*

HIGGINS: A new fashion, by George! And it ought to look horrible!

DOOLITTLE: *with fatherly pride* Well, I never thought she'd clean up as good looking as that, Governor. She's a credit to me, ain't she?

LIZA: I tell you, it's easy to clean up here. Hot and cold water on tap, just as much as you like, there is. Woolly towels, there is; and a towel horse so hot, it burns your fingers. Soft brushes to scrub yourself, and a wooden bowl of soap smelling like primroses. Now I know why ladies is so clean. Washing's a treat for them. Wish they saw what it is for the like of me!

HIGGINS: I'm glad the bath-room met with your approval.

LIZA: It didn't: not all of it; and I don't care who hears me say it. Mrs. Pearce knows.

HIGGINS: What was wrong, Mrs. Pearce?

MRS. PEARCE: *blandly* Oh, nothing, sir. It doesn't matter.

LIZA: I had a good mind to break it. I didn't know which way to look. But I hung a towel over it, I did.

HIGGINS: Over what?

MRS. PEARCE: Over the looking-glass, sir.

HIGGINS: Doolittle: you have brought your daughter up too strictly.

DOOLITTLE: Me! I never brought her up at all, except to give her a lick of a strap now and again. Don't put it on me, Governor. She ain't accustomed to it, you see: that's all. But she'll soon pick up your free-and-easy ways.

LIZA: I'm a good girl, I am; and I won't pick up no free and easy ways.

HIGGINS: Eliza: If you say again that you're a good girl, your father shall take you home.

LIZA: Not him. You don't know my father. All he come here for was to touch you for some money to get drunk on.

DOOLITTLE: Well, what else would I want money for? To put into the plate in church, I suppose. *She puts out her tongue at him. He is so incensed by this that Pickering presently finds it necessary to step between them.* Don't you give me none of your lip; and don't let me hear you giving this gentleman any of it neither, or you'll hear from me about it. See?

HIGGINS: Have you any further advice to give her before you go, Doolittle? Your blessing, for instance.

DOOLITTLE: No, Governor: I ain't such a mug as to put up my children to all I know myself. Hard enough to hold them in without that. If you want Eliza's mind improved, Governor, you do it yourself with a strap. So long, gentlemen. *He turns to go.*

HIGGINS: *impressively* Stop. You'll come regularly to see your daughter. It's your duty, you know. My brother is a clergyman; and he could help you in your talks with her.

DOOLITTLE: *evasively* Certainly. I'll come, Governor. Not just this week, because I have a job at a distance. But later on you may depend on me. Afternoon, gentlemen. Afternoon, ma'am. *He takes off his hat to Mrs. Pearce, who disdains the salutation and goes out. He winks at Higgins, thinking him probably a fellow sufferer from Mrs. Pearce's difficult disposition, and follows her.*

LIZA: Don't you believe the old liar. He'd as soon you set a bull-dog on him as a clergyman. You won't see him again in a hurry.

HIGGINS: I don't want to, Eliza. Do you?

LIZA: Not me. I don't want never to see him again, I don't. He's a disgrace to me, he is, collecting dust, instead of working at his trade.

PICKERING: What is his trade, Eliza?

LIZA: Talking money out of other people's pockets into his own. His proper trade's a navvy; and he works at it sometimes too—forexercise--and earns good money at it. Ain't you going to call me Miss Doolittle any more?

PICKERING: I beg your pardon, Miss Doolittle. It was a slip of the tongue.

LIZA: Oh, I don't mind; only it sounded so genteel. I should just like to take a taxi to the corner of Tottenham Court Road and get out there and tell it to wait for me, just to put the girls in their place a bit. I wouldn't speak to them, you know.

PICKERING: Better wait til we get you something really fashionable.

HIGGINS: Besides, you shouldn't cut your old friends now that you have risen in the world. That's what we call snobbery.

LIZA: You don't call the like of them my friends now, I should hope. They've took it out of me often enough with their ridicule when they had the chance; and now I mean to get a bit of my own back. But if I'm to have fashionable clothes, I'll wait. I should like to have some. Mrs Pearce says you're

going to give me some to wear in bed at night different to what I wear in the daytime; but it do seem a waste of money when you could get something to show. Besides, I never could fancy changing into cold things on a winter night.

MRS. PEARCE: *coming back* Now, Eliza. The new things have come for you to try on.

LIZA: Ah—ow—oo—ooh! *She rushes out.*

MRS. PEARCE: *following her* Oh, don't rush about like that, girl. *She shuts the door behind her.*

HIGGINS: Pickering: we have taken on a stiff job.

PICKERING: *with conviction* Higgins: We have.

Le note di scena sono tra parentesi *quadre* o *(tonde).*

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