Pygmalion - Act III

di George Bernard Shaw (1913)

ACT III

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It is Mrs. Higgins's at-home day. Nobody has yet arrived. Her drawing-room, in a flat on Chelsea embankment, has three windows looking on the river; and the ceiling is not so lofty as it would be in an older house of the same pretension. The windows are open, giving access to a balcony with flowers in pots. If you stand with your face to the windows, you have the fireplace on your left and the door in the right-hand wall close to the corner nearest the windows.

Mrs. Higgins was brought up on Morris and Burne Jones; and her room, which is very unlike her son's room in Wimpole Street, is not crowded with furniture and little tables and nicknacks. In the middle of the room there is a big ottoman; and this, with the carpet, the Morris wall-papers, and the Morris chintz window curtains and brocade covers of the ottoman and its cushions, supply all the ornament, and are much too handsome to be hidden by odds and ends of useless things. A few good oil-paintings from the exhibitions in the Grosvenor Gallery thirty years ago the Burne Jones, not the Whistler side of them are on the walls. The only landscape is a Cecil Lawson on the scale of a Rubens. There is a portrait of Mrs. Higgins as she was when she defied fashion in her youth in one of the beautiful Rossettian costumes which, when caricatured by people who did not understand, led to the absurdities of popular estheticism in the eighteen-seventies.

In the corner diagonally opposite the door Mrs. Higgins, now over sixty and long past taking the trouble to dress out of the fashion, sits writing at an elegantly simple writing-table with a bell button within reach of her hand. There is a Chippendale chair further back in the room between her and the window nearest her side. At the other side of the room, further forward, is an Elizabethan chair roughly carved in the taste of Inigo Jones. On the same side a piano in a decorated case. The corner between the fireplace and the window is occupied by a divan cushioned in Morris chintz.

It is between four and five in the afternoon.

The door is opened violently; and Higgins enters with his hat on.

MRS. HIGGINS: *dismayed* Henry *scolding him!* What are you doing here to-day? It is my at home day: you promised not to come. *As he bends to kiss her, she takes his hat off, and presents it to him.*

HIGGINS: Oh bother! *He throws the hat down on the table.*

MRS. HIGGINS: Go home at once.

HIGGINS: *kissing her* I know, mother. I came on purpose.

MRS. HIGGINS: But you mustn't. I'm serious, Henry. You offend all my friends: They stop coming whenever they meet you.

HIGGINS: Nonsense! I know I have no small talk; but people don't mind. *He sits on the settee.*

MRS. HIGGINS: Oh! don't they? Small talk indeed! What about your large talk? Really, dear, you mustn't stay.

HIGGINS: I must. I've a job for you. A phonetic job.

MRS. HIGGINS: No use, dear. I'm sorry; but I can't get round your vowels; and though I like to get pretty postcards in your patent shorthand, I always have to read the copies in ordinary writing you so thoughtfully send me.

HIGGINS: Well, this isn't a phonetic job.

MRS. HIGGINS: You said it was.

HIGGINS: Not your part of it. I've picked up a girl.

MRS. HIGGINS: Does that mean that some girl has picked you up?

HIGGINS: Not at all. I don't mean a love affair.

MRS. HIGGINS: What a pity!

HIGGINS: Why?

MRS. HIGGINS: Well, you never fall in love with anyone under forty-five. When will you discover that there are some rather nice-looking young women about?

HIGGINS: Oh, I can't be bothered with young women. My idea of a loveable woman is something as like you as possible. I shall never get into the way of seriously liking young women: some habits lie too deep to be changed. *Rising abruptly and walking about, jingling his money and his keys in his trouser pockets* Besides, they're all idiots.

MRS. HIGGINS: Do you know what you would do if you really loved me, Henry?

HIGGINS: Oh bother! What? Marry, I suppose?

MRS. HIGGINS: No. Stop fidgeting and take your hands out of your pockets. *With a gesture of despair, he obeys and sits down again.* That's a good boy. Now tell me about the girl.

HIGGINS: She's coming to see you.

MRS. HIGGINS: I don't remember asking her.

HIGGINS: You didn't. I asked her. If you'd known her you wouldn't have asked her.

MRS. HIGGINS: Indeed! Why?

HIGGINS: Well, it's like this. She's a common flower girl. I picked her off the kerbstone.

MRS. HIGGINS: And invited her to my at-home!

HIGGINS: *rising and coming to her to coax her* Oh, that'll be all right. I've taught her to speak properly; and she has strict orders as to her behavior. She's to keep to two subjects: the weather and everybody's health—Fineday and How do you do, you know—andnot to let herself go on things in general. That will be safe.

MRS. HIGGINS: Safe! To talk about our health! about our insides! Perhaps about our outsides! How could you be so silly, Henry?

HIGGINS: *impatiently* Well, she must talk about something. *He controls himself and sits down again.* Oh, she'll be all right: Don't you fuss. Pickering is in it with me. I've a sort of bet on that I'll pass her off as a duchess in six months. I started on her some months ago and she's getting on like a house on fire. I shall win my bet. She has a quick ear; and she's been easier to teach than my middle-class pupils because she's had to learn a complete new language. She talks English almost as you talk French.

MRS. HIGGINS: That's satisfactory, at all events.

HIGGINS: Well, it is and it isn't.

MRS. HIGGINS: What does that mean?

HIGGINS: You see, I've got her pronunciation all right; but you have to consider not only how a girl pronounces, but what she pronounces; and that's where—

HIGGINS: They are interrupted by the parlor-maid, announcing guests.

THE PARLOR-MAID: Mrs and Miss Eynsford Hill. *She withdraws.*

HIGGINS: Oh Lord! *He rises; snatches his hat from the table; and makes for the door; but before he reaches it his mother introduces him.*

Mrs. and Miss Eynsford Hill are the mother and daughter who sheltered from the rain in Covent Garden. The mother is well bred, quiet, and has the habitual anxiety of straitened means. The daughter has acquired a gay air of being very much at home in society: the bravado of genteel poverty.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: *to Mrs Higgins* How do you do? *They shake hands.*

MISS EYNSFORD HILL: How d'you do? *She shakes.*

MRS. HIGGINS: *introducing* My son Henry.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: Your celebrated son! I have so longed to meet you, Professor Higgins.

HIGGINS: *glumly, making no movement in her direction* Delighted. *He backs against the piano and bows brusquely.*

HIGGINS: Miss EYNSFORD HILL *going to him with confident familiarity* How do you do?

HIGGINS: *staring at her* I've seen you before somewhere. I haven't the ghost of a notion where; but I've heard your voice. *Drearily* It doesn't matter. You'd better sit down.

MRS. HIGGINS: I'm sorry to say that my celebrated son has no manners. You mustn't mind him.

MISS EYNSFORD HILL: *gaily* I don't. *She sits in the Elizabethan chair.*

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: *a little bewildered* Not at all. *She sits on the ottoman between her daughter and Mrs Higgins, who has turned her chair away from the writing-table.*

HIGGINS: Oh, have I been rude? I didn't mean to be. *He goes to the central window, through which, with his back to the company, he contemplates the river and the flowers in Battersea Park on the opposite bank as if they were a frozen desert.*

The parlor-maid returns, ushering in Pickering.

THE PARLOR-MAID: Colonel Pickering *She withdraws.*

PICKERING: How do you do, Mrs Higgins?

MRS. HIGGINS: So glad you've come. Do you know Mrs. Eynsford Hill—Miss Eynsford Hill? *Exchange of bows. The Colonel brings the Chippendale chair a little forward between Mrs Hill and Mrs Higgins, and sits down.*

PICKERING: Has Henry told you what we've come for?

HIGGINS: *over his shoulder* We were interrupted: damn it!

MRS. HIGGINS: Oh Henry, Henry, really!

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: *half rising* Are we in the way?

MRS. HIGGINS: *rising and making her sit down again* No, no. You couldn't have come more fortunately: we want you to meet a friend of ours.

HIGGINS: *turning hopefully* Yes, by George! We want two or three people. You'll do as well as anybody else.

The parlor-maid returns, ushering Freddy.

THE PARLOR-MAID: Mr. Eynsford Hill.

HIGGINS: *almost audibly, past endurance* God of Heaven! another of them.

FREDDY: *shaking hands with Mrs. Higgins* Ahdedo?

MRS. HIGGINS: Very good of you to come. *Introducing* Colonel Pickering.

FREDDY: *bowing* Ahdedo?

MRS. HIGGINS: I don't think you know my son, Professor Higgins.

FREDDY: *going to Higgins* Ahdedo?

HIGGINS: *looking at him much as if he were a pickpocket* I'll take my oath I've met you before somewhere. Where was it?

FREDDY: I don't think so.

HIGGINS: *resignedly* It don't matter, anyhow. Sit down. He shakes Freddy's hand, and almost slings him on the ottoman with his face to the windows; then comes round to the other side of it.

HIGGINS: Well, here we are, anyhow! *He sits down on the ottoman next Mrs. Eynsford Hill, on her left.* And now, what the devil are we going to talk about until Eliza comes?

MRS. HIGGINS: Henry: you are the life and soul of the Royal Society's soirees; but really you're rather trying on more commonplace occasions.

HIGGINS: Am I? Very sorry. *Beaming suddenly* I suppose I am, you know. *Uproariously* Ha, ha!

MISS EYNSFORD HILL: *who considers Higgins quite eligible matrimonially* I sympathize. I haven't any small talk. If people would only be frank and say what they really think!

HIGGINS: *relapsing into gloom* Lord forbid!

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: *taking up her daughter's cue* But why?

HIGGINS: What they think they ought to think is bad enough, Lord knows; but what they really think would break up the whole show. Do you suppose it would be really agreeable if I were to come out now with what I really think?

MISS EYNSFORD HILL: *gaily* Is it so very cynical?

HIGGINS: Cynical! Who the dickens said it was cynical? I mean it wouldn't be decent.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: *seriously* Oh! I'm sure you don't mean that, Mr. Higgins.

HIGGINS: You see, we're all savages, more or less. We're supposed to be civilized and cultured—to know all about poetry and philosophy and art and science, and so on; but how many of us know even the meanings of these names? *To Miss Hill* What do you know of poetry? *To Mrs. Hill* What do you know of science? *Indicating Freddy* What does he know of art or science or anything else? What the devil do you imagine I know of philosophy?

MRS. HIGGINS: *warningly* Or of manners, Henry?

THE PARLOR-MAID: *opening the door* Miss Doolittle. *She withdraws.*

HIGGINS: *rising hastily and running to Mrs. Higgins* Here she is, mother. *He stands on tiptoe and makes signs over his mother's head to Eliza to indicate to her which lady is her hostess.*

Eliza, who is exquisitely dressed, produces an impression of such remarkable distinction and beauty as she enters that they all rise, quite flustered. Guided by Higgins's signals, she comes to Mrs Higgins with studied grace.

LIZA: *speaking with pedantic correctness of pronunciation and great beauty of tone* How do you do, Mrs. Higgins? *She gasps slightly in making sure of the H in Higgins, but is quite successful.* Mr. Higgins told me I might come.

MRS. HIGGINS: *cordially* Quite right: I'm very glad indeed to see you.

PICKERING: How do you do, Miss Doolittle?

LIZA: *shaking hands with him* Colonel Pickering, is it not?

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: I feel sure we have met before, Miss Doolittle. I remember your eyes.

LIZA: How do you do? *She sits down on the ottoman gracefully in the place just left vacant by Higgins.*

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: *introducing* My daughter Clara.

LIZA: How do you do?

CLARA: *impulsively* How do you do? *She sits down on the ottoman beside Eliza, devouring her with her eyes.*

FREDDY: *coming to their side of the ottoman* I've certainly had the pleasure.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: *introducing* My son Freddy.

LIZA: How do you do?

Freddy bows and sits down in the Elizabethan chair, infatuated.

HIGGINS: *suddenly* By George, yes: it all comes back to me! *They stare at him.* Covent Garden! *Lamentably* What a damned thing!

MRS. HIGGINS: Henry, please! *He is about to sit on the edge of the table.* Don't sit on my writing-table: You'll break it.

HIGGINS: *sulkily* Sorry.

He goes to the divan, stumbling into the fender and over the fire-irons on his way; extricating himself with muttered imprecations; and finishing his disastrous journey by throwing himself so impatiently on the divan that he almost breaks it. Mrs. Higgins looks at him, but controls herself and says nothing.

A long and painful pause ensues.

MRS. HIGGINS: *at last, conversationally* Will it rain, do you think?

LIZA: The shallow depression in the west of these islands is likely to move slowly in an easterly direction. There are no indications of any great change in the barometrical situation.

FREDDY: Ha! ha! how awfully funny!

LIZA: What is wrong with that, young man? I bet I got it right.

FREDDY: Killing!

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: I'm sure I hope it won't turn cold. There's so much influenza about. It runs right through our whole family regularly every spring.

LIZA: *darkly* My aunt died of influenza: So they said.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: *clicks her tongue sympathetically!!!*

LIZA: *in the same tragic tone* But it's my belief they done the old woman in.

MRS. HIGGINS: *puzzled* Done her in?

LIZA: Y-e-e-e-es, Lord love you! Why should she die of influenza? She come through diphtheria right enough the year before. I saw her with my own eyes. Fairly blue with it, she was. They all thought she was dead; but my father he kept ladling gin down her throat til she came to so sudden that she bit the bowl off the spoon.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: *startled* Dear me!

LIZA: *piling up the indictment* What call would a woman with that strength in her have to die of influenza? What become of her new straw hat that should have come to me? Somebody pinched it; and what I say is, them as pinched it done her in.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: What does doing her in mean?

HIGGINS: *hastily* Oh, that's the new small talk. To do a person in means to kill them.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: *to Eliza, horrified* You surely don't believe that your aunt was killed?

LIZA: Do I not! Them she lived with would have killed her for a hat-pin, let alone a hat.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: But it can't have been right for your father to pour spirits down her throat like that. It might have killed her.

LIZA: Not her. Gin was mother's milk to her. Besides, he'd poured so much down his own throat that he knew the good of it.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: Do you mean that he drank?

LIZA: Drank! My word! Something chronic.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: How dreadful for you!

LIZA: Not a bit. It never did him no harm what I could see. But then he did not keep it up regular. *Cheerfully* On the burst, as you might say, from time to time. And always more agreeable when he had a drop in. When he was out of work, my mother used to give him fourpence and tell him to go out and not come back until he'd drunk himself cheerful and loving-like. There's lots of women has to make their husbands drunk to make them fit to live with. *Now quite at her ease.* You see, it's like this. If a man has a bit of a conscience, it always takes him when he's sober; and then it makes him low-spirited. A drop of booze just takes that off and makes him happy. *To Freddy, who is in convulsions of suppressed laughter.* Here! what are you sniggering at?

FREDDY: The new small talk. You do it so awfully well.

LIZA: If I was doing it proper, what was you laughing at? *To Higgins* Have I said anything I oughtn't?

MRS. HIGGINS: *interposing* Not at all, Miss Doolittle.

LIZA: Well, that's a mercy, anyhow. *Expansively* What I always say is—

HIGGINS: *rising and looking at his watch* Ahem!

LIZA: *looking round at him; taking the hint; and rising* Well: I must go. *They all rise. Freddy goes to the door.* So pleased to have met you. Good-bye. *She shakes hands with Mrs Higgins.*

MRS. HIGGINS: Good-bye.

LIZA: Good-bye, Colonel Pickering.

PICKERING: Good-bye, Miss Doolittle. *They shake hands.*

LIZA: *nodding to the others* Good-bye, all.

FREDDY: *opening the door for her* Are you walking across the Park, Miss Doolittle? If so—

LIZA: Walk! Not bloody likely. *Sensation.* I am going in a taxi. *She goes out.*

Pickering gasps and sits down. Freddy goes out on the balcony to catch another glimpse of Eliza.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: *suffering from shock* Well, I really can't get used to the new ways.

CLARA: *throwing herself discontentedly into the Elizabethan chair.* Oh, it's all right, mamma, quite right. People will think we never go anywhere or see anybody if you are so old-fashioned.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: I daresay I am very old-fashioned; but I do hope you won't begin using that expression, Clara. I have got accustomed to hear you talking about men as rotters, and calling everything filthy and beastly; though I do think it horrible and unladylike. But this last is really too much. Don't you think so, Colonel Pickering?

PICKERING: Don't ask me. I've been away in India for several years; and manners have changed so much that I sometimes don't know whether I'm at a respectable dinner-table or in a ship's forecastle.

CLARA: It's all a matter of habit. There's no right or wrong in it. Nobody means anything by it. And it's so quaint, and gives such a smart emphasis to things that are not in themselves very witty. I find the new small talk delightful and quite innocent.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: *rising* Well, after that, I think it's time for us to go.

Pickering and Higgins rise.

CLARA: *rising* Oh yes: we have three at homes to go to still. Good-bye, Mrs. Higgins. Good-bye, Colonel Pickering. Good-bye, Professor Higgins.

HIGGINS: *coming grimly at her from the divan, and accompanying her to the door* Good-bye. Be sure you try on that small talk at the three at-homes. Don't be nervous about it. Pitch it in strong.

CLARA: *all smiles* I will. Good-bye. Such nonsense, all this early Victorian prudery!

HIGGINS: *tempting her* Such damned nonsense!

CLARA: Such bloody nonsense!

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: *convulsively* Clara!

CLARA: Ha! ha! *She goes out radiant, conscious of being thoroughly up to date, and is heard descending the stairs in a stream of silvery laughter.*

FREDDY: *to the heavens at large* Well, I ask you *He gives it up, and comes to Mrs. Higgins.* Good-bye.

MRS. HIGGINS: *shaking hands* Good-bye. Would you like to meet Miss Doolittle again?

FREDDY: *eagerly* Yes, I should, most awfully.

MRS. HIGGINS: Well, you know my days.

FREDDY: Yes. Thanks awfully. Good-bye. *He goes out.*

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: Good-bye, Mr. Higgins.

HIGGINS: Good-bye. Good-bye.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: *to Pickering* It's no use. I shall never be able to bring myself to use that word.

PICKERING: Don't. It's not compulsory, you know. You'll get on quite well without it.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: Only, Clara is so down on me if I am not positively reeking with the latest slang. Good-bye.

PICKERING: Good-bye. *They shake hands.*

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: *to Mrs Higgins* You mustn't mind Clara. *Pickering, catching from her lowered tone that this is not meant for him to hear, discreetly joins Higgins at the window.* We're so poor! And she gets so few parties, poor child! She doesn't quite know. *Mrs Higgins, seeing that her eyes are moist, takes her hand sympathetically and goes with her to the door.* But the boy is nice. Don't you think so?

MRS. HIGGINS: Oh, quite nice. I shall always be delighted to see him.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL: Thank you, dear. Good-bye. *She goes out.*

HIGGINS: *eagerly* Well? Is Eliza presentable *he swoops on his mother and drags her to the ottoman, where she sits down in Eliza's place with her son on her left.*

Pickering returns to his chair on her right.

MRS. HIGGINS: You silly boy, of course she's not presentable. She's a triumph of your art and of her dressmaker's; but if you suppose for a moment that she doesn't give herself away in every sentence she utters, you must be perfectly cracked about her.

PICKERING: But don't you think something might be done? I mean something to eliminate the sanguinary element from her conversation.

MRS. HIGGINS: Not as long as she is in Henry's hands.

HIGGINS: *aggrieved* Do you mean that my language is improper?

MRS. HIGGINS: No, dearest: It would be quite proper—sayon a canal barge; but it would not be proper for her at a garden party.

HIGGINS: *deeply injured* Well I must say—

PICKERING: *interrupting him* Come, Higgins: you must learn to know yourself. I haven't heard such language as yours since we used to review the volunteers in Hyde Park twenty years ago.

HIGGINS: *sulkily* Oh, well, if you say so, I suppose I don't always talk like a bishop.

MRS. HIGGINS: *quieting Henry with a touch* Colonel Pickering: Will you tell me what is the exact state of things in Wimpole Street?

PICKERING: *cheerfully: as if this completely changed the subject* Well, I have come to live there with Henry. We work together at my Indian Dialects; and we think it more convenient—

MRS. HIGGINS: Quite so. I know all about that: It's an excellent arrangement. But where does this girl live?

HIGGINS: With us, of course. Where would she live?

MRS. HIGGINS: But on what terms? Is she a servant? If not, what is she?

PICKERING: *slowly* I think I know what you mean, Mrs. Higgins.

HIGGINS: Well, dash me if I do! I've had to work at the girl every day for months to get her to her present pitch. Besides, she's useful. She knows where my things are, and remembers my appointments and so forth.

MRS. HIGGINS: How does your housekeeper get on with her?

HIGGINS: Mrs. Pearce? Oh, she's jolly glad to get so much taken off her hands; for before Eliza came, she had to have to find things and remind me of my appointments. But she's got some silly bee in her bonnet about Eliza. She keeps saying "You don't think, sir": doesn't she, Pick?

PICKERING: Yes: That's the formula. "You don't think, sir." That's the end of every conversation about Eliza.

HIGGINS: As if I ever stop thinking about the girl and her confounded vowels and consonants. I'm worn out, thinking about her, and watching her lips and her teeth and her tongue, not to mention her soul, which is the quaintest of the lot.

MRS. HIGGINS: You certainly are a pretty pair of babies, playing with your live doll.

HIGGINS: Playing! The hardest job I ever tackled: make no mistake about that, mother. But you have no idea how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into a quite different

human being by creating a new speech for her. It's filling up the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul from soul.

PICKERING: *drawing his chair closer to Mrs. Higgins and bending over to her eagerly* Yes: It's enormously interesting. I assure you, Mrs. Higgins, we take Eliza very seriously. Every week—every day almost—there is some new change. Closer again We keep records of every stage—dozens of gramophone disks and photographs—

HIGGINS: *assailing her at the other ear* Yes, by George: It's the most absorbing experiment I ever tackled. She regularly fills our lives up; doesn't she, Pick?

PICKERING: We're always talking Eliza.

HIGGINS: Teaching Eliza.

PICKERING: Dressing Eliza.

MRS. HIGGINS: What!

HIGGINS: Inventing new Elizas.

Higgins and Pickering, speaking together:

HIGGINS: You know, she has the most extraordinary quickness of ear—

PICKERING: I assure you, my dear Mrs. Higgins, that girl—

HIGGINS: just like a parrot. I've tried her with every—

PICKERING: is a genius. She can play the piano quite beautifully—

HIGGINS: possible sort of sound that a human being can make—

PICKERING: We have taken her to classical concerts and to music—

HIGGINS: Continental dialects, African dialects, Hottentot—

PICKERING: halls; and it's all the same to her: she plays everything—

HIGGINS: clicks, things it took me years to get hold of; and—

PICKERING: she hears right off when she comes home, whether it's—

HIGGINS: she picks them up like a shot, right away, as if she had—

PICKERING: Beethoven and Brahms or Lehar and Lionel Morickton;—

HIGGINS: been at it all her life.—

PICKERING: though six months ago, she'd never as much as touched a piano.—

MRS. HIGGINS: *putting her fingers in her ears, as they are by this time shouting one another down with an intolerable noise* Sh—sh—sh—sh! *They stop.*

PICKERING: I beg your pardon. *He draws his chair back apologetically.*

HIGGINS: Sorry. When Pickering starts shouting nobody can get a word in edgeways.

MRS. HIGGINS: Be quiet, Henry. Colonel Pickering: don't you realize that when Eliza walked into Wimpole Street, something walked in with her?

PICKERING: Her father did. But Henry soon got rid of him.

MRS. HIGGINS: It would have been more to the point if her mother had. But as her mother didn't something else did.

PICKERING: But what?

MRS. HIGGINS: *unconsciously dating herself by the word* A problem.

PICKERING: Oh, I see. The problem of how to pass her off as a lady.

HIGGINS: I'll solve that problem. I've half solved it already.

MRS. HIGGINS: No, you two infinitely stupid male creatures: The problem of what is to be done with her afterwards.

HIGGINS: I don't see anything in that. She can go her own way, with all the advantages I have given her.

MRS. HIGGINS: The advantages of that poor woman who was here just now! The manners and habits that disqualify a fine lady from earning her own living without giving her a fine lady's income! Is that what you mean?

PICKERING: *indulgently, being rather bored* Oh, that will be all right, Mrs Higgins. *He rises to go..*

HIGGINS: *rising also* We'll find her some light employment.

PICKERING: She's happy enough. Don't you worry about her. Good-bye. *He shakes hands as if he were consoling a frightened child, and makes for the door.*

HIGGINS: Anyhow, there's no good bothering now. The thing's done. Good-bye, mother. *He kisses her, and follows Pickering.*

PICKERING: *turning for a final consolation* There are plenty of openings. We'll do what's right. Good-bye.

HIGGINS: *to Pickering as they go out together* Let's take her to the Shakespear exhibition at Earls Court.

PICKERING: Yes: Let's. Her remarks will be delicious.

HIGGINS: She'll mimic all the people for us when we get home.

PICKERING: Ripping. *Both are heard laughing as they go downstairs.*

MRS. HIGGINS: *rises with an impatient bounce, and returns to her work at the writing-table. She sweeps a litter of disarranged papers out of her way; snatches a sheet of paper from her stationery case; and tries resolutely to write. At the third line she gives it up; flings down her pen; grips the table angrily and exclaims:* Oh, men! men!! men!!!

Clearly Eliza will not pass as a duchess yet: and Higgins's bet remains unwon. But the six months are not yet exhausted; and just in time Eliza does actually pass as a princess. For a glimpse of how she did it imagine an Embassy in London one summer evening after dark. The hall door has an awning and a carpet across the sidewalk to the kerb, because a grand receprion is in progress. A small crowd is lined up to see the guests arrive.

A Rolls-Royce car drives up. Pickering in evening dress, with medals and orders, alights, and hands out Eliza, in opera cloak, evening dress, diamonds, fan, flowers and all accessories. Higgins follows. The car drives off; and the three go up the steps and into the house, the door opening for them as they approach. Inside the house they find themselves in a spacious hall from which the grand staircase rises. On the left are the arrangements for the gentlemen's cloaks. The male guests are depositing their hats and wraps there.

On the right there is a door leading to the ladies' cloakroom. Ladies are going in cloaked and coming out in splendor. Pickering whispers to Eliza and points out the ladies' room. She goes into. Higgins and Pickering take off their overcoats and take tickets for them from the attendant.

One of the guests, occupied in the same way, has his back turned. Having taken his tickets, he turns round and reveals himself as an important looking young man with an astonishingly hairy face. He has an enormous moustache, flowing out into luxuriant whiskers. Waves of hair cluster on his brow. His hair is cropped closely at the back, and glows with oil. Otherwise he is very smart. He wears several worthless orders. He is evidently a foreigner, guessable as a whispered Pandour from Hungary; but in

spite of the ferocity of his moustache he is amiable and genially voluble.

Recognizing Higgins he flings his arms wide apart and approaches him enthusiastically.

MRS. HIGGINS: WHISKERS Maestro, maestro *he embraces Higgins and kisses him on both cheeks* You remember me?

HIGGINS: No, I dont. Who the devil are you?

HIGGINS: WHISKERS I am your pupil: your first pupil, your best and greatest pupil. I am little Nepommuck, the marvellous boy. I have made your name famous throughout Europe. You teach me phonetic. You cannot forget ME.

HIGGINS: Why dont you shave?

NEPOMMUCK: I have not your imposing appearance, your chin, your brow. Nobody notice me when I shave. Now I am famous: They call me Hairy Faced Dick.

HIGGINS: And what are you doing here among all these swells?

NEPOMMUCK: I am interpreter. I speak 32 languages. I am indispensable at these international parties. You are a great cockney specialist: you place a man anywhere in London the moment he opens his mouth. I place any man in Europe.

A footman hurries down the grand staircase and comes to Nepommuck.

NEPOMMUCK: FOOTMAN You are wanted upstairs. Her Excellency cannot understand the Greek gentleman.

NEPOMMUCK: Thank you, yes, immediately.

The footman goes and is lost in the crowd.

NEPOMMUCK: *to Higgins* This Greek diplomatist pretends he cannot speak nor understand English. He cannot deceive me. He is a son of a Clerkenwell watchmaker. He speaks English so villainously that he dare not utter a word of it without betraying his origin. I help him to pretend; but I make him pay through the nose. I make them all pay. Ha ha! *He hurries upstairs*

PICKERING: Is this fellow really an expert? Can he find out Eliza and blackmail her?

HIGGINS: We shall see. If he finds her out I lose my bet.

Eliza comes from the cloakroom and joins them.

PICKERING: Well, Eliza, now for it. Are you ready?

LIZA: Are you nervous, Colonel?

PICKERING: Frightfully. I feel exactly as I felt before my first battle. It's the first time that frightens.

LIZA: It is not the first time for me, Colonel. I have done this fifty times – hundreds of times – in my little piggery in Angel Court in my daydreams. I am in a dream now. Promise me not to let Professor Higgins wake me; for if he does I shall forget everything and talk as I used in Drury Lane.

PICKERING: Not a word, Higgins. *To Eliza* Now, ready?

LIZA: Ready.

PICKERING: Go.

They mount the stairs, Higgins last. Pickering whispers to the footman on the first landing.

PICKERING: FIRST LANDING FOOTMAN Miss Doolittle, Colonel Pickering, Professor Higgins.

PICKERING: SECOND LANDING FOOTMAN Miss Doolittle, Colonel Pickering, Professor Higgins.

At the top of the staircase the Ambassador and his wife, with Nepommuck at her elbow, are receiving.

HOSTESS: *taking Eliza's hand* How d'ye do?

HOST: *same play* How d'ye do? How d'ye do, Pickering?

LIZA: *with a beautiful gravity that awes her hostess* How do you do? *She passes on to the drawing-room.*

HOSTESS: Is that your adopted daughter, Colonel Pickering? She will make a sensation.

PICKERING: Most kind of you to invite her for me. *He passes on.*

HOSTESS: *to Nepommuck.* Find out all about her.

NEPOMMUCK: *bowing.* Excellency – *He goes into the crowd.*

HOST: How d'ye do, Higgins? You have a rival here tonight. He introduced himself as your pupil. Is he any good?

HIGGINS: He can learn a language in a fortnight – knows dozens of them. A sure mark of a fool. As a phonetician, no good whatever.

HOSTESS: How d'ye do, professor?

HIGGINS: How do you do? Fearful bore for you this sort of thing. Forgive my part in it. *He passes on.*

In the drawing-room and its suite of salons the reception is in full swing. Eliza passes through. She is so intent on her ordeal that she walks like a somnambulist in a desert instead of a débutante in a fashionable crowd. They stop talking to look at her, admiring her dress, her jewels, and her strangely attractive self. Some of the younger ones at the back stand on their chairs to see.

The Host and the Hostess come in through the staircase and mingle with their guests. Higgins, gloomy and contemptuous of the whole business, comes into the group where they are chatting.

HOSTESS: Ah, there is Professor Higgins: he will tell us. Tell us about the wonderful young lady, Professor.

HIGGINS: *almost morosely* What wonderful young lady?

HOSTESS: You know very well. They tell me there has been nothing like her in London since people stood on their chairs to look at Mrs Langtry.

Nepommuck joins the group, full of news.

HOSTESS: Ah, there you are at last, Nepommuck. Have you found out all about the Doolittle lady?

NEPOMMUCK: I have found out all about her. She is a fraud.

HOSTESS: A fraud! Oh, no.

NEPOMMUCK: Yes, yes. She cannot deceive me. Her name cannot be Doolittle.

HIGGINS: Why?

NEPOMMUCK: Because Doolittle is an English name. And she is not English.

HOSTESS: Oh, nonsense! She speaks English perfectly.

NEPOMMUCK: Too perfectly. Can you show me any English woman who speaks English as it should be spoken? Only foreigners who have been taught to speak it speak it well.

HOSTESS: Certainly she terrified me by the way she said How d'ye do. I had a schoolmistress who talked like that; and I was mortally afraid of her. But if she is not English what is she?

NEPOMMUCK: Hungarian.

NEPOMMUCK: ALL THE REST Hungarian!

NEPOMMUCK: Hungarian. And of royal blood. I am Hungarian. My blood is royal.

HIGGINS: Did you speak to her in Hungarian?

NEPOMMUCK: I did. She was very clever. She said "Please speak to me in English: I do not understand French." French! She pretends not to know the difference between Hungarian and French. Impossible: she knows both.

HIGGINS: And the royal blood? How did you find that out?

NEPOMMUCK: Instinct, maestro, instinct. Only the Magyar races can produce that air of the divine right, those resolute eyes. She is a princess.

HOST: What do you say, Professor?

HIGGINS: I say an ordinary London girl out of the gutter and taught to speak by an expert. I place her in the Drury Lane.

NEPOMMUCK: Ha ha ha! Oh, maestro, maestro, you are mad on the subject of cockney dialects. The London gutter is the whole world for you.

HIGGINS: *to the hostess* What does your Excellency say?

HOSTESS: Oh, of course I agree with Nepommuck. She must be a princess at least.

HOST: Not necessarily legitimate, of course. Morganatic perhaps. But that is undoubtedly her class.

HIGGINS: I stick to my opinion.

HOSTESS: Oh, you are incorrigible.

The group breaks up, leaving Higgins isolated. Pickering joins him.

PICKERING: Where is Eliza? We must keep an eye on her.

Eliza joins them.

LIZA: I dont think I can bear much more. The people all stare so at me. An old lady has just told me that I speak exactly like Queen Victoria. I am sorry if I have lost your bet. I have done my best: but nothing can make me the same as these people.

PICKERING: You have not lost it, my dear. You have won it ten times over.

HIGGINS: Let us get out of this. I have had enough of chattering to these fools.

PICKERING: Eliza is tired; and I am hungry. Let us clear out and have supper somewhere.

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

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