

Pygmalion

George Bernard Shaw



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Pygmalion

NOTE FOR TECHNICIANS: A complete representation of the play as printed for the first time in this edition is technically possible only on the cinema screen or on stages furnished with exceptionally elaborate machinery. For ordinary theatrical use the scenes separated by rows of asterisks are to be omitted.

In the dialogue an *e* upside down indicates the indefinite vowel, sometimes called “obscure” or “neutral”, for which, though it is one of the commonest sounds in English speech, our wretched alphabet has no letter.¹

1 NOTE FOR TECHNICIANS... *has no letter*: Added to the 1941 Edn.

ACT ONE

London at 11.15 p.m. Torrents of heavy summer rain. Cab whistles blowing frantically in all directions. Pedestrians running for shelter into the portico of St Paul's Church (not Wren's cathedral, but Inigo Jones's church in Covent Garden vegetable market), among them a lady and her daughter in evening dress. All are peering out gloomily at the rain, except one man with his back turned to the rest, wholly preoccupied with a notebook in which he is writing.¹

The church clock strikes the first quarter.

THE DAUGHTER (*in the space between the central pillars, close to the one on her left*): I'm getting chilled to the bone. What can Freddy be doing all this time? He's been gone twenty minutes.

THE MOTHER (*on her daughter's right*): Not so long. But he ought to have got us a cab by this.

1 *London... he is writing*: 1916 Edn: "Covent Garden at 11.15 p.m. Torrents of heavy summer rain. Cab whistles blowing frantically in all directions. Pedestrians running for shelter into the market and under the portico of St. Paul's Church, where there are already several people, among them a lady and her daughter in evening dress. They are all peering out gloomily at the rain, except one man with his back turned to the rest, who seems wholly preoccupied with a notebook in which he is writing busily."

A BYSTANDER (*on the lady's right*): He won't get no cab, not until half-past eleven, missus, when they come back after dropping their theatre fares.

THE MOTHER: But we must have a cab. We can't stand here until half-past eleven. It's too bad.

THE BYSTANDER: Well, it ain't my fault, missus.

THE DAUGHTER: If Freddy had a bit of gumption, he would have got one at the theatre door.

THE MOTHER: What could he have done, poor boy?

THE DAUGHTER: Other people get¹ cabs. Why couldn't he?

(Freddy rushes in out of the rain from the Southampton Street side, and comes between them closing a dripping umbrella. He is a young man of twenty, in evening dress, very wet round the ankles.)

THE DAUGHTER: Well, haven't you got a cab?

FREDDY: There's not one to be had for love or money.

THE MOTHER: Oh, Freddy, there must be one. You can't have tried.

THE DAUGHTER: It's too tiresome. Do you expect us to go and get one ourselves?

FREDDY: I tell you they're all engaged. The rain was so sudden: nobody was prepared, and everybody had to take a cab. I've been to Charing Cross one way and nearly to Ludgate Circus the other, and they were all engaged.

THE MOTHER: Did you try Trafalgar Square?

FREDDY: There wasn't one at Trafalgar Square.

THE DAUGHTER: Did you try?

FREDDY: I tried as far as Charing Cross Station. Did you expect me to walk to Hammersmith?

1 *get*: 1916 Edn: "got".

ACT ONE

THE DAUGHTER: You haven't tried at all.

THE MOTHER: You really are very helpless, Freddy. Go again
— and don't come back until you have found a cab.

FREDDY: I shall simply get soaked for nothing.

THE DAUGHTER: And what about us? Are we to stay here all
night in this draught, with next to nothing on? You selfish
pig—

FREDDY: Oh, very well — I'll go, I'll go.

(He opens his umbrella and dashes off Strandwards, but comes into collision with a flower-girl who is hurrying in for shelter, knocking her basket out of her hands. A blinding flash of lightning, followed instantly by a rattling peal of thunder, orchestrates the incident.)

THE FLOWER-GIRL: Nah then, Freddy: look wh' y' gowin', deah.

FREDDY: Sorry. *(He rushes off.)*

THE FLOWER-GIRL *(picking up her scattered flowers and replacing them in the basket)*: There's menners f' yer! Tə-oo¹
banches o voylets trod into the mad.*

(She sits down on the plinth of the column, sorting her flowers, on the lady's right. She is not at all a romantic figure.² She is perhaps eighteen, perhaps twenty, hardly older. She wears a little sailor hat of black straw that has long been exposed to the dust and soot of London and has seldom if ever been brushed. Her hair needs washing rather badly: its mousy colour can hardly be natural. She wears a shoddy black coat that reaches nearly to her knees and is shaped to her waist. She

1 Tə-oo: 1916 Edn: "Te-oo".

2 a romantic figure: 1916 Edn: "an attractive person".

has a brown skirt with a coarse apron. Her boots are much the worse for wear. She is no doubt as clean as she can afford to be – but compared to the ladies she is very dirty. Her features are no worse than theirs, but their condition leaves something to be desired, and she needs the services of a dentist.)

THE MOTHER: How do you know that my son's name is Freddy, pray?

THE FLOWER-GIRL: Ow, eez ya-ooa¹ san, is e? Wal, fewd dan y' d-ooty² bawmz a mather should, eed now bettern to spawl a pore gel's flahrzn than ran awy athaht pyin. Will ye-oo py me f'them?*

(Here, with apologies, this desperate attempt to represent her dialect without a phonetic alphabet must be abandoned as unintelligible outside London.)

THE DAUGHTER: Do nothing of the sort, Mother. The idea!

THE MOTHER: Please allow me, Clara. Have you any pennies?

THE DAUGHTER: No. I've nothing smaller than sixpence.

THE FLOWER-GIRL (*hopefully*): I can give you change for a tanner, kind lady.

THE MOTHER (*to Clara*): Give it to me. (*Clara parts reluctantly.*) Now (*to the girl*), this is for your flowers.

THE FLOWER-GIRL: Thank you kindly, lady.

THE DAUGHTER: Make her give you the change. These things are only a penny a bunch.

THE MOTHER: Do hold your tongue, Clara. (*To the girl*) You can keep the change.

THE FLOWER-GIRL: Oh, thank you, lady.

1 *ya-ooa*: 1916 Edn: "ye-ooa".

2 *d-ooty*: 1916 Edn: "de-ooty".

ACT ONE

THE MOTHER: Now tell me how you know that young gentleman's name.

THE FLOWER-GIRL: I didn't.

THE MOTHER: I heard you call him by it. Don't try to deceive me.

THE FLOWER-GIRL (*protesting*): Who's trying to deceive you? I called him Freddy or Charlie, same as you might yourself if you was talking to a stranger and wished to be pleasant.¹

THE DAUGHTER: Sixpence thrown away! Really, Mamma, you might have spared Freddy *that*.

*(She retreats in disgust behind the pillar. An elderly gentleman of the amiable military type rushes into the shelter and closes a dripping umbrella. He is in the same plight as Freddy, very wet about the ankles. He is in evening dress, with a light overcoat. He takes the place left vacant by the daughter.)*²

THE GENTLEMAN: Phew!

THE MOTHER (*to the gentleman*): Oh, sir, is there any sign of its stopping?

THE GENTLEMAN: I'm afraid not. It started worse than ever about two minutes ago. (*He goes to the plinth beside the flower-girl, puts up his foot on it and stoops to turn down his trouser ends.*)

THE MOTHER: Oh dear! (*She retires sadly and joins her daughter.*)

THE FLOWER-GIRL (*taking advantage of the military gentleman's proximity to establish friendly relations with him*): If it's worse, it's a sign it's nearly over. So cheer up, Captain, and buy a flower off a poor girl.

THE GENTLEMAN: I'm sorry. I haven't any change.

1 *pleasant*: 1916 Edn: "pleasant. (*She sits down beside her basket.*)"

2 *the daughter*: 1916 Edn: "the daughter's retirement".

THE FLOWER-GIRL: I can give you change, Captain.

THE GENTLEMAN: For a sovereign? I've nothing less.

THE FLOWER-GIRL: Garn! Oh, do buy a flower off me, Captain.
I can change half a crown. Take this for tuppence.

THE GENTLEMAN: Now, don't be troublesome – there's a good girl. (*Trying his pockets*) I really haven't any change... Stop: here's three ha'pence, if that's any use to you. (*He retreats to the other pillar.*)

THE FLOWER-GIRL (*disappointed, but thinking three half-pence better than nothing*): Thank you, sir.

THE BYSTANDER (*to the girl*): You be careful: give him a flower for it. There's a bloke here behind taking down every blessed word you're saying. (*All turn to the man who is taking notes.*)

THE FLOWER-GIRL (*springing up terrified*): I ain't done nothing wrong by speaking to the gentleman. I've a right to sell flowers if I keep off the kerb. (*Hysterically*) I'm a respectable girl: so help me, I never spoke to him except to ask him to buy a flower off me.

(*General hubbub, mostly sympathetic to the flower-girl, but deprecating her excessive sensibility. Cries of "Don't start hollerin'. Who's hurting you? Nobody's going to touch you. What's the good of fussing? Steady on. Easy easy", etc., come from the elderly staid spectators, who pat her comfortingly. Less patient ones bid her shut her head, or ask her roughly what is wrong with her. A remoter group, not knowing what the matter is, crowd in and increase the noise with question and answer: "What's the row? What she do? Where is he? A tec taking her down. What! Him? Yes: him over there: Took money off the gentleman", etc.*)

ACT ONE

THE FLOWER-GIRL (*breaking through them¹ to the gentleman, crying wildly*): Oh, sir, don't let him charge me. You dunno what it means to me. They'll take away my character and drive me on the streets for speaking to gentlemen. They—

THE NOTE-TAKER (*coming forward on her right, the rest crowding after him*): There! There! There! There! Who's hurting you, you silly girl? What do you take me for?

THE BYSTANDER: It's aw rawt: e's a gentleman: look at his bæ-oots.² (*Explaining to the note-taker*) She thought you was a copper's nark, sir.

THE NOTE-TAKER (*with quick interest*): What's a copper's nark?

THE BYSTANDER (*inapt at definition*): It's a... well, it's a copper's nark, as you might say. What else would you call it? A sort of informer.

THE FLOWER-GIRL (*still hysterical*): I take my Bible oath I never said a word—

THE NOTE-TAKER (*overbearing but good-humoured*): Oh, shut up, shut up. Do I look like a policeman?

THE FLOWER-GIRL (*far from reassured*): Then what did you take down my words for? How do I know whether you took me down right? You just show me what you've wrote about me. (*The note-taker opens his book and holds it steadily under her nose, though the pressure of the mob trying to read it over his shoulders would upset a weaker man.*) What's that? That ain't proper writing. I can't read that.

THE NOTE-TAKER: I can. (*Reads, reproducing her pronunciation exactly*) "Cheer ap, Keptin, n' baw ya flahr orf a pore gel."

1 *the gentleman... through them*: 1916 Edn: "the gentleman, etc. (*The flower-girl, distraught and mobbed, breaks through them*)".

2 *It's aw rawt... his bæ-oots*: 1916 Edn: "It's all right: he's a gentleman: look at his boots".

THE FLOWER-GIRL (*much distressed*): It's because I called him "Captain". I meant no harm. (*To the gentleman*) Oh, sir, don't let him lay a charge agen me for a word like that. You—

THE GENTLEMAN: Charge! I make no charge. (*To the note-taker*) Really, sir, if you are a detective, you need not begin protecting me against molestation by young women until I ask you. Anybody could see that the girl meant no harm.

THE BYSTANDERS GENERALLY (*demonstrating against police espionage*): Course they could. What business is it of yours? You mind your own affairs. He wants promotion, he does. Taking down people's words! Girl never said a word to him. What harm if she did? Nice thing a girl can't shelter from the rain without being insulted, etc., etc., etc. (*She is conducted by the more sympathetic demonstrators back to her plinth, where she resumes her seat and struggles with her emotion.*)

THE BYSTANDER: He ain't a tec. He's a blooming busybody: that's what he is. I tell you, look at his bə-oots.¹

THE NOTE-TAKER (*turning on him genially*): And how are all your people down at Selsey?

THE BYSTANDER (*suspiciously*): Who told you my people come from Selsey?

THE NOTE-TAKER: Never you mind. They did. (*To the girl*) How do you come to be up so far east? You were born in Lisson Grove.

THE FLOWER-GIRL (*appalled*): Oh, what harm is there in my leaving Lisson Grove? It wasn't fit for a pig to live in — and I had to pay four-and-six a week. (*In tears*) Oh, boo-hoo-oo...

THE NOTE-TAKER: Live where you like, but stop that noise.

1 bə-oots: 1916 Edn: "boots".

ACT ONE

THE GENTLEMAN (*to the girl*): Come, come! He can't touch you: you have a right to live where you please.

A SARCASTIC BYSTANDER (*thrusting himself between the note-taker and the gentleman*): Park Lane, for instance. I'd like to go into the Housing Question* with you, I would.

THE FLOWER-GIRL (*subsiding into a brooding melancholy over her basket, and talking very low-spiritedly to herself*): I'm a good girl, I am.

THE SARCASTIC BYSTANDER (*not attending to her*): Do you know where *I* come from?

THE NOTE-TAKER (*promptly*): Hoxton. (*Titterings. Popular interest in the note-taker's performance increases.*)

THE SARCASTIC ONE (*amazed*): Well, who said I didn't? Blimey! You know everything, you do.

THE FLOWER-GIRL (*still nursing her sense of injury*): Ain't no call to meddle with me, he ain't.

THE BYSTANDER (*to her*): Of course he ain't. Don't you stand it from him. (*To the note-taker*): See here: what call have you to know about people what never offered to meddle with you?¹

THE FLOWER-GIRL: Let him say what he likes. I don't want to have no truck with him.

THE BYSTANDER: You take us for dirt under your feet, don't you? Catch you taking liberties with a gentleman!

THE SARCASTIC BYSTANDER: Yes: tell him where he come from, if you want to go fortune-telling.

THE NOTE-TAKER: Cheltenham, Harrow, Cambridge and India.

I *with you?*: 1916 Edn: "with you? Where's your warrant?" / SEVERAL BYSTANDERS (*encouraged by this seeming point of law*): Yes: where's your warrant?

THE GENTLEMAN: Quite right. (*Great laughter. Reaction in the note-taker's favour. Exclamations of "He knows all about it. Told him proper. Hear him tell the toff where he come from?"*, etc.)

THE GENTLEMAN: May I ask, sir, do you do this for your living at a music hall?

THE NOTE-TAKER: I've thought of that. Perhaps I shall some day. (*The rain has stopped, and the persons on the outside of the crowd begin to drop off.*)

THE FLOWER-GIRL (*resenting the reaction*): He's no gentleman, he ain't, to interfere with a poor girl.

THE DAUGHTER (*out of patience, pushing her way rudely to the front and displacing the gentleman, who politely retires to the other side of the pillar*): What on earth is Freddy doing? I shall get pneumownia¹ if I stay in this draught any longer.

THE NOTE-TAKER (*to himself, hastily making a note of her pronunciation of "monia"*): Earl's Court.

THE DAUGHTER (*violently*): Will you please keep your impertinent remarks to yourself.

THE NOTE-TAKER: Did I say that out loud? I didn't mean to. I beg your pardon. Your mother's Epsom, unmistakably.

THE MOTHER (*advancing between the² daughter and the note-taker*): How very curious! I was brought up in Largetady Park, near Epsom.

THE NOTE-TAKER (*uproariously amused*): Ha! Ha! What a devil of a name! Excuse me. (*To the daughter*) You want a cab, do you?

THE DAUGHTER: Don't dare speak to me.

THE MOTHER: Oh, please, please, Clara. (*Her daughter repudiates her with an angry shrug and retires haughtily.*) We

1 *pneumownia*: 1916 Edn: "pneumonia".

2 *the*: 1916 Edn: "her".

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