**Mrs Higgins**

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 around 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 curbstone.

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 — Fine day and How do you do, you know — and not 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 completely 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?