ACT ONE

Scene One

Outside the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, after the theater, on a cold March night. A flower girl, ELIZA DOOLITTLE, comes forward with a basket of flowers.

ELIZA

Aaaooowww!

FREDDY

(clumsily trying to help her)

I'm frightfully sorry.

ELIZA

(wailing)

Two bunches of violets trod in the mud! A full day's wages. Why don't you look where you're going?

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL

Get a taxi, Freddy. Do you want me to catch pneumonia?

FREDDY

I'm sorry, mother. I'll get a taxi right away.

(to Eliza)

Sorry.

(HE goes. COLONEL PICKERING emerges dressed in evening clothes and looking for a taxi. He is a middle-aged gentleman of the amiable military type.)

ELIZA

 (to Mrs. Eynsford-Hill)

Oh, he's your son, is he? Well, if you'd done your duty by him as a mother should, you wouldn't let him spoil a poor girl's flowers and then run away without paying.

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL

Go on about your business, my girl.

(SHE follows her son.)

ELIZA

(muttering to herself, as she collects her flowers)

Two bunches of violets trod in the mud.

PICKERING

(calling off)

Taxi! Taxi!

ELIZA

(to Pickering)

I say, Captain, buy a flower off a poor girl.

HIGGINS

(explosively)

Woman! Cease this detestable boohooing instantly or else seek the shelter of some other place of worship.

ELIZA

(with feeble defiance)

I've a right to be here if I like, same as you.

HIGGINS

A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere-no right to live. Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech; that your native language is the language of Shakespeare and Milton and the Bible; and don't sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon!

ELIZA

(quite overwhelmed, not daring to raise her head)

Aoooooooooooow!

(HIGGINS points at Eliza. **1. Why Can’t the English?)**

HIGGINS

Look at her-a pris'ner of the gutters;

Condemned by ev'ry syllable she utters.

By right 'she should be taken out and hung

For the cold-blooded murder of the English tongue

ELIZA

-Gam!

HIGGINS

I ask you, sir, what sort of word is that?

It's "Aooow" and "Gam" that keep her in her place.

Not her wretched clothes and dirty face.

Why can't the English teach their children how to speak?

This verbal class distinction by now should be antique.

If you spoke as she does, sir, instead of the way you do,

Why, you might be selling flowers, too.

PICKERING

I beg your pardon!

HIGGINS

An Englishman's way of speaking absolutely classifies him

The moment he talks he makes some other English-man despise him.

One common language I'm afraid we 'n never get.

Oh, why can't the English learn to set

A good example to people whose English is painful to your ears?

The Scotch and the Irish leave you close to tears.

There even are places where English completely disappears.

In America, they haven't used it for years!

Why can't the English teach their children how to speak?

Norwegians learn Norwegian; the Greeks are taught their Greek.

In France every Frenchman knows his language from "A" to "Zed"

The French never care what they do, actually, as long as they pronounce it properly.

Arabians learn Arabian with the speed of summer lightning.

The Hebrews learn it backwards, which is absolutely frightening.

But use proper English, you're regarded as a freak.

Why can't the English,

Why can't the English learn to speak?