Candida - Act I

di George Bernard Shaw (1898)

ACT I

A fine October morning in the north east suburbs of London, a vast district many miles away from the London of Mayfair and St. James's, much less known there than the Paris of the Rue de Rivoli and the Champs Elysees, and much less narrow, squalid, fetid and airless in its slums; strong in comfortable, prosperous middle class life; wide-streeted, myriad-populated; well-served with ugly iron urinals, Radical clubs, tram lines, and a perpetual stream of yellow cars; enjoying in its main thoroughfares the luxury of grass-grown "front gardens," untrodden by the foot of man save as to the path from the gate to the hall door; but blighted by an intolerable monotony of miles and miles of graceless, characterless brick houses, black iron railings, stony pavements, slaty roofs, and respectably ill dressed or disreputably poorly dressed people, quite accustomed to the place, and mostly plodding about somebody else's work, which they would not do if they themselves could help it. The little energy and eagerness that crop up show themselves in cockney cupidity and business "push." Even the policemen and the chapels are not infrequent enough to break the monotony. The sun is shining cheerfully; there is no fog; and though the smoke effectually prevents anything, whether faces and hands or bricks and mortar, from looking fresh and clean, it is not hanging heavily enough to trouble a Londoner.

This desert of unattractiveness has its oasis. Near the outer end of the Hackney Road is a park of 217 acres, fenced in, not by railings, but by a wooden paling, and containing plenty of greensward, trees, a lake for bathers, flower beds with the flowers arranged carefully in patterns by the admired cockney art of carpet gardening and a sandpit, imported from the seaside for the delight of the children, but speedily deserted on its becoming a natural vermin preserve for all the petty fauna of Kingsland, Hackney and Hoxton. A bandstand, an unfinished forum for religious, anti-religious and political orators, cricket pitches, a gymnasium, and an old fashioned stone kiosk are among its attractions. Wherever the prospect is bounded by trees or rising green grounds, it is a pleasant place. Where the ground stretches far to the grey palings, with bricks and mortar, sky signs, crowded chimneys and smoke beyond, the prospect makes it desolate and sordid.

The best view of Victoria Park is from the front window of St. Dominic's Parsonage, from which not a single chimney is visible. The parsonage is a semi-detached villa with a front garden and a porch. Visitors go up the flight of steps to the porch: tradespeople and members of the family go down by a door under the steps to the basement, with a breakfast room, used for all meals, in front, and the kitchen at the back. Upstairs, on the level of the hall door, is the drawing-room, with its large plate glass window looking on the park. In this room, the only sitting-room that can be spared from the children and the family meals, the parson, the Reverend James Mavor Morell does his work. He is sitting in a strong round backed revolving chair at the right hand end of a long table, which stands across the window, so that he can cheer himself with the view of the park at his elbow. At the opposite end of the table, adjoining it, is a little table; only half the width of the other, with a typewriter on it. His typist is sitting at this machine, with her back to the window. The large table is littered with pamphlets, journals, letters, nests of drawers, an office diary, postage scales and the like. A spare chair for visitors having business with the parson is in the middle, turned to his end. Within reach of his hand is a stationery case, and a cabinet photograph in a frame. Behind him the right hand wall, recessed above the fireplace, is fitted with bookshelves, on which an adept eye can measure the parson's divinity and casuistry by a complete set of Browning's poems and Maurice's Theological Essays, and guess at his politics from a yellow backed Progress and Poverty, Fabian Essays, a Dream of John Ball, Marx's Capital, and half a dozen other literary landmarks in Socialism. Opposite him on the left, near the typewriter, is the door. Further down the room, opposite the fireplace, a bookcase stands on a cellaret, with a sofa near it. There is a generous fire burning; and the hearth, with a comfortable armchair and a japanned flower painted coal scuttle at one side, a miniature chair for a boy or girl on the other, a nicely varnished wooden mantelpiece, with neatly moulded shelves, tiny bits of mirror let into the panels, and

a travelling clock in a leather case the inevitable wedding present, and on the wall above a large autotype of the chief figure in Titian's Virgin of the Assumption, is very inviting. Altogether the room is the room of a good housekeeper, vanquished, as far as the table is concerned, by an untidy man, but elsewhere mistress of the situation. The furniture, in its ornamental aspect, betrays the style of the advertised "drawing-room suite" of the pushing suburban furniture dealer; but there is nothing useless or pretentious in the room. The paper and panelling are dark, throwing the big cheery window and the park outside into strong relief.

The Reverend James Mavor Morell is a Christian Socialist clergyman of the Church of England, and an active member of the Guild of St. Matthew and the Christian Social Union. A vigorous, genial, popular man of forty, robust and goodlooking, full of energy, with pleasant, hearty, considerate manners, and a sound, unaffected voice, which he uses with the clean, athletic articulation of a practised orator, and with a wide range and perfect command of expression. He is a first rate clergyman, able to say what he likes to whom he likes, to lecture people without setting himself up against them, to impose his authority on them without humiliating them, and to interfere in their business without impertinence. His well-spring of spiritual enthusiasm and sympathetic emotion has never run dry for a moment: he still eats and sleeps heartily enough to win the daily battle between exhaustion and recuperation triumphantly. Withal, a great baby, pardonably vain of his powers and unconsciously pleased with himself. He has a healthy complexion, a good forehead, with the brows somewhat blunt, and the eyes bright and eager, a mouth resolute, but not particularly well cut, and a substantial nose, with the mobile, spreading nostrils of the dramatic orator, but, like all his features, void of subtlety.

The typist, Miss Proserpine Garnett, is a brisk little woman of about 30, of the lower middle class, neatly but cheaply dressed in a black merino skirt and a blouse, rather pert and quick of speech, and not very civil in her manner, but sensitive and affectionate. She is clattering away busily at her machine whilst Morell opens the last of his morning's letters. He realizes its contents with a comic groan of despair.

PROSERPINE: Another lecture?

MORELL: Yes. The Hoxton Freedom Group want me to address them on Sunday morning *great emphasis on "Sunday," this being the unreasonable part of the business.* What are they?

PROSERPINE: Communist Anarchists, I think.

MORELL: Just like Anarchists not to know that they can't have a parson on Sunday! Tell them to come to church if they want to hear me: it will do them good. Say I can only come on Mondays and Thursdays. Have you the diary there?

PROSERPINE: *taking up the diary.* Yes.

MORELL: Have I any lecture on for next Monday?

PROSERPINE: *referring to diary.* Tower Hamlets Radical Club.

MORELL: Well, Thursday then?

PROSERPINE: English Land Restoration League.

MORELL: What next?

PROSERPINE: Guild of St. Matthew on Monday. Independent Labor Party, Greenwich Branch, on Thursday. Monday, Social-Democratic Federation, Mile End Branch. Thursday, first Confirmation class—*Impatiently.* Oh, I'd better tell them you can't come. They're only half a dozen ignorant and conceited costermongers without five shillings between them.

MORELL: *amused.* Ah; but you see they're near relatives of mine, Miss Garnett.

PROSERPINE: *staring at him.* Relatives of YOURS!

MORELL: Yes: we have the same father—in Heaven.

PROSERPINE: *relieved.* Oh, is that all?

MORELL: *with a sadness which is a luxury to a man whose voice expresses it so finely.* Ah, you don't believe it. Everybody says it: nobody believes it—nobody. *Briskly, getting back to business.* Well, well! Come, Miss Proserpine, can't you find a date for the costers? What about the 25th?: that was vacant the day before yesterday.

PROSERPINE: *referring to diary.* Engaged—the Fabian Society.

MORELL: Bother the Fabian Society! Is the 28th gone too?

PROSERPINE: City dinner. You're invited to dine with the Founder's Company.

MORELL: That'll do; I'll go to the Hoxton Group of Freedom instead. *(She enters the engagement in silence, with implacable disparagement of the Hoxton Anarchists in every line of her face. Morell bursts open the cover of a copy of The Church Reformer, which has come by post, and glances through Mr. Stewart Hendlam's leader and the Guild of St. Matthew news. These proceedings are presently enlivened by the appearance of Morell's curate, the Reverend Alexander Mill, a young gentleman gathered by Morell from the nearest University settlement, whither he had come from Oxford to give the east end of London the benefit of his university training. He is a conceitedly well intentioned, enthusiastic, immature person, with nothing positively unbearable about him except a habit of speaking with his lips carefully closed for half an inch from each corner, a finicking arthulation, and a set of horribly corrupt vowels, notably ow for o, this being his chief means of bringing Oxford refinement to bear on Hackney vulgarity. Morell, whom he has won over by a doglike devotion, looks up indulgently from The Church Reformer as he enters, and remarks)* Well, Lexy! Late again, as usual.

LEXY: I'm afraid so. I wish I could get up in the morning.

MORELL: *exulting in his own energy.* Ha! ha! *Whimsically.* Watch and pray, Lexy: watch and pray.

LEXY: I know. *Rising wittily to the occasion.* But how can I watch and pray when I am asleep? Isn't that so, Miss Prossy?

PROSERPINE: *sharply.* Miss Garnett, if you please.

LEXY: I beg your pardon—Miss Garnett.

PROSERPINE: You've got to do all the work to-day.

LEXY: Why?

PROSERPINE: Never mind why. It will do you good to earn your supper before you eat it, for once in a way, as I do. Come: don't dawdle. You should have been off on your rounds half an hour ago.

LEXY: *perplexed.* Is she in earnest, Morell?

MORELL: *in the highest spirits—his eyes dancing.* Yes. I am going to dawdle to-day.

LEXY: You! You don't know how. MORELL *heartily.* Ha! ha! Don't I? I'm going to have this day all to myself—or at least the forenoon. My wife's coming back: she's due here at 11.45.

LEXY: *surprised.* Coming back already—with the children? I thought they were to stay to the end of the month.

MORELL: So they are: she's only coming up for two days, to get some flannel things for Jimmy, and to see how we're getting on without her.

LEXY: *anxiously.* But, my dear Morell, if what Jimmy and Fluffy had was scarlatina, do you think it wise—

MORELL: Scarlatina!—rubbish, German measles. I brought it into the house myself from the Pycroft

Street School. A parson is like a doctor, my boy: he must face infection as a soldier must face bullets. *He rises and claps Lexy on the shoulder.* Catch the measles if you can, Lexy: she'll nurse you; and what a piece of luck that will be for you!—eh?

LEXY: *smiling uneasily.* It's so hard to understand you about Mrs. Morell—

MORELL: *tenderly.* Ah, my boy, get married—get married to a good woman; and then you'll understand. That's a foretaste of what will be best in the Kingdom of Heaven we are trying to establish on earth. That will cure you of dawdling. An honest man feels that he must pay Heaven for every hour of happiness with a good spell of hard, unselfish work to make others happy. We have no more right to consume happiness without producing it than to consume wealth without producing it. Get a wife like my Candida; and you'll always be in arrear with your repayment. *He pats Lexy affectionately on the back, and is leaving the room when Lexy calls to him.*

LEXY: Oh, wait a bit: I forgot. *Morell halts and turns with the door knob in his hand.* Your father-in-law is coming round to see you. *Morell shuts the door again, with a complete change of manner.*

MORELL: *surprised and not pleased.* Mr. Burgess?

LEXY: Yes. I passed him in the park, arguing with somebody. He gave me good day and asked me to let you know that he was coming.

MORELL: *half incredulous.* But he hasn't called here for—I may almost say for years. Are you sure, Lexy? You're not joking, are you?

LEXY: *earnestly.* No, sir, really.

MORELL: *thoughtfully.* Hm! Time for him to take another look at Candida before she grows out of his knowledge. *He resigns himself to the inevitable, and goes out. Lexy looks after him with beaming, foolish worship.*

LEXY: What a good man! What a thorough, loving soul he is! *He takes Morell's place at the table, making himself very comfortable as he takes out a cigaret.*

PROSERPINE: *impatiently, pulling the letter she has been working at off the typewriter and folding it.* Oh, a man ought to be able to be fond of his wife without making a fool of himself about her.

LEXY: *shocked.* Oh, Miss Prossy!

PROSERPINE: *rising busily and coming to the stationery case to get an envelope, in which she encloses the letter as she speaks.* Candida here, and Candida there, and Candida everywhere! *She licks the envelope.* It's enough to drive anyone out of their SENSES *thumping the envelope to make it stick* to hear a perfectly commonplace woman raved about in that absurd manner merely because she's got good hair, and a tolerable figure.

LEXY: *with reproachful gravity.* I think her extremely beautiful, Miss Garnett. *He takes the photograph up; looks at it; and adds, with even greater impressiveness* EXTREMELY beautiful. How fine her eyes are!

PROSERPINE: Her eyes are not a bit better than mine—now! *He puts down the photograph and stares austerely at her.* And you know very well that you think me dowdy and second rate enough.

LEXY: *rising majestically.* Heaven forbid that I should think of any of God's creatures in such a way! *He moves stiffly away from her across the room to the neighbourhood of the bookcase.*

PROSERPINE: Thank you. That's very nice and comforting.

LEXY: *saddened by her depravity.* I had no idea you had any feeling against Mrs. Morell.

PROSERPINE: *indignantly.* I have no feeling against her. She's very nice, very good-hearted: I'm very fond of her and can appreciate her real qualities far better than any man can. *He shakes his head*

sadly and turns to the bookcase, looking along the shelves for a volume. She follows him with intense pepperiness. You don't believe me? *He turns and faces her. She pounces at him with spitfire energy.* You think I'm jealous. Oh, what a profound knowledge of the human heart you have, Mr. Lexy Mill! How well you know the weaknesses of Woman, don't you? It must be so nice to be a man and have a fine penetrating intellect instead of mere emotions like us, and to know that the reason we don't share your amorous delusions is that we're all jealous of one another! *She abandons him with a toss of her shoulders, and crosses to the fire to warm her hands.*

LEXY: Ah, if you women only had the same clue to Man's strength that you have to his weakness, Miss Prossy, there would be no Woman Question.

PROSERPINE: *over her shoulder, as she stoops, holding her hands to the blaze.* Where did you hear Morell say that? You didn't invent it yourself: you're not clever enough.

LEXY: That's quite true. I am not ashamed of owing him that, as I owe him so many other spiritual truths. He said it at the annual conference of the Women's Liberal Federation. Allow me to add that though they didn't appreciate it, I, a mere man, did. *He turns to the bookcase again, hoping that this may leave her crushed.*

PROSERPINE: *putting her hair straight at the little panel of mirror in the mantelpiece.* Well, when you talk to me, give me your own ideas, such as they are, and not his. You never cut a poorer figure than when you are trying to imitate him.

LEXY: *stung.* I try to follow his example, not to imitate him.

PROSERPINE: *coming at him again on her way back to her work.* Yes, you do: you IMITATE him. Why do you tuck your umbrella under your left arm instead of carrying it in your hand like anyone else? Why do you walk with your chin stuck out before you, hurrying along with that eager look in your eyes—you,who never get up before half past nine in the morning? Why do you say "knoaledge" in church, though you always say "knolledge" in private conversation! Bah! do you think I don't know? *She goes back to the typewriter.* Here, come and set about your work: we've wasted enough time for one morning. Here's a copy of the diary for to-day. *She hands him a memorandum.*

LEXY: *deeply offended.* Thank you. *(He takes it and stands at the table with his back to her, reading it. She begins to transcribe her shorthand notes on the typewriter without troubling herself about his feelings. Mr. Burgess enters unannounced. He is a man of sixty, made coarse and sordid by the compulsory selfishness of petty commerce, and later on softened into sluggish bumptiousness by overfeeding and commercial success. A vulgar, ignorant, guzzling man, offensive and contemptuous to people whose labor is cheap, respectful to wealth and rank, and quite sincere and without rancour or envy in both attitudes. Finding him without talent, the world has offered him no decently paid work except ignoble work, and he has become in consequence, somewhat hoggish. But he has no suspicion of this himself, and honestly regards his commercial prosperity as the inevitable and socially wholesome triumph of the ability, industry, shrewdness and experience in business of a man who in private is easygoing, affectionate and humorously convivial to a fault. Corporeally, he is a podgy man, with a square, clean shaven face and a square beard under his chin; dust colored, with a patch of grey in the centre, and small watery blue eyes with a plaintively sentimental expression, which he transfers easily to his voice by his habit of pompously intoning his sentences.)*

BURGESS: *stopping on the threshold, and looking round.* They told me Mr. Morell was here.

PROSERPINE: *rising.* He's upstairs. I'll fetch him for you.

BURGESS: *staring boorishly at her.* You're not the same young lady as used to typewrite for him?

PROSERPINE: No.

BURGESS: *assenting.* No: she was younger. *Miss Garnett stolidly stares at him; then goes out with great dignity. He receives this quite obtusely, and crosses to the hearth-rug, where he turns and spreads himself with his back to the fire.* Startin' on your rounds, Mr. Mill?

LEXY: *folding his paper and pocketing it.* Yes: I must be off presently.

BURGESS: *momentously.* Don't let me detain you, Mr. Mill. What I come about is private between me and Mr. Morell.

LEXY: *huffily.* I have no intention of intruding, I am sure, Mr. Burgess. Good morning.

BURGESS: *patronizingly.* Oh, good morning to you. *Morell returns as Lexy is making for the door.*

MORELL: *to Lexy.* Off to work?

LEXY: Yes, sir.

MORELL: *patting him affectionately on the shoulder.* Take my silk handkerchief and wrap your throat up. There's a cold wind. Away with you. *Lexy brightens up, and goes out.*

BURGESS: Spoilin' your curates, as usu'l, James. Good mornin'. When I pay a man, an' 'is livin' depen's on me, I keep him in his place.

MORELL: *rather shortly.* I always keep my curates in their places as my helpers and comrades. If you get as much work out of your clerks and warehousemen as I do out of my curates, you must be getting rich pretty fast. Will you take your old chair? *He points with curt authority to the arm chair beside the fireplace; then takes the spare chair from the table and sits down in front of Burgess.*

BURGESS: *without moving.* Just the same as hever, James!

MORELL: When you last called—it was about three years ago, I think—you said the same thing a little more frankly. Your exact words then were: "Just as big a fool as ever, James?"

BURGESS: *soothingly.* Well, perhaps I did; but *with conciliatory cheerfulness* I meant no offence by it. A clergyman is privileged to be a bit of a fool, you know: it's on'y becomin' in his profession that he should. Anyhow, I come here, not to rake up hold differences, but to let bygones be bygones. *Suddenly becoming very solemn, and approaching Morell.* James: three year ago, you done me a hill turn. You done me hout of a contrac'; an' when I gev you 'arsh words in my nat'ral disappointment, you turned my daughrter again me. Well, I've come to act the part of a Cherischin. *Offering his hand.* I forgive you, James.

MORELL: *starting up.* Confound your impudence!

BURGESS: *retreating, with almost lachrymose deprecation of this treatment.* Is that becomin' language for a clergyman, James?—and you so partic'lar, too?

MORELL: *hotly.* No, sir, it is not becoming language for a clergyman. I used the wrong word. I should have said damn your impudence: that's what St. Paul, or any honest priest would have said to you. Do you think I have forgotten that tender of yours for the contract to supply clothing to the workhouse?

BURGESS: *in a paroxysm of public spirit.* I acted in the interest of the ratepayers, James. It was the lowest tender: you can't deny that.

MORELL: Yes, the lowest, because you paid worse wages than any other employer—starvation wages—aye, worse than starvation wages—to the women who made the clothing. Your wages would have driven them to the streets to keep body and soul together. *Getting angrier and. angrier.* Those women were my parishioners. I shamed the Guardians out of accepting your tender: I shamed the ratepayers out of letting them do it: I shamed everybody but you. *Boiling*

over. How dare you, sir, come here and offer to forgive me, and talk about your daughter, and—

BURGESS: Easy, James, easy, easy. Don't git hinto a fluster about nothink. I've howned I was wrong.

MORELL: *fuming about.* Have you? I didn't hear you.

BURGESS: Of course I did. I hown it now. Come: I harsk your pardon for the letter I wrote you. Is that enough?

MORELL: *snapping his fingers.* That's nothing. Have you raised the wages?

BURGESS: *triumphantly.* Yes.

MORELL: *stopping dead.* What!

BURGESS: *unctuously.* I've turned a moddle hemployer. I don't hemploy no women now: they're all sacked; and the work is done by machinery. Not a man 'as less than sixpence a hour; and the skilled 'ands gits the Trade Union rate. *Proudly.* What 'ave you to say to me now?

MORELL: *overwhelmed.* Is it possible! Well, there's more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth—*Going to Burgess with an explosion of apologetic cordiality.* My dear Burgess, I most heartily beg your pardon for my hard thoughts of you. *Grasps his hand.* And now, don't you feel the better for the change? Come, confess, you're happier. You look happier.

BURGESS: *ruefully.* Well, p'raps I do. I s'pose I must, since you notice it. At all events, I git my contrax asseppit *accepted* by the County Council. *Savagely.* They dussent'ave nothink to do with me unless I paid fair wages—curse'em for a parcel o' meddlin' fools!

MORELL: *dropping his hand, utterly discouraged.* So that was why you raised the wages! *He sits down moodily.*

BURGESS: *severely, in spreading, mounting tones.* Why else should I do it? What does it lead to but drink and huppishness in workin' men? *He seats himself magisterially in the easy chair.* It's hall very well for you, James: it gits you hinto the papers and makes a great man of you; but you never think of the 'arm you do, puttin' money into the pockets of workin' men that they don't know 'ow to spend, and takin' it from people that might be makin' a good huse on it.

MORELL: *with a heavy sigh, speaking with cold politeness.* What is your business with me this morning? I shall not pretend to believe that you are here merely out of family sentiment.

BURGESS: *obstinately.* Yes, I ham—just family sentiment and nothink else.

MORELL: *with weary calm.* I don't believe you!

BURGESS: *rising threateningly.* Don't say that to me again, James Mavor Morell.

MORELL: *unmoved.* I'll say it just as often as may be necessary to convince you that it's true. I don't believe you.

BURGESS: *collapsing into an abyss of wounded feeling.* Oh, well, if you're determined to be unfriendly, I s'pose I'd better go. *He moves reluctantly towards the door. Morell makes no sign. He lingers.* I didn't hexpect to find a hunforgivin' spirit in you, James. *Morell still not responding, he takes a few more reluctant steps doorwards. Then he comes back whining.* We huseter git on well enough, spite of our different opinions. Why are you so changed to me? I give you my word I come here in pyorr *pure* frenliness, not wishin' to be on bad terms with my hown daughrter's 'usban'. Come, James: be a Cherishin and shake 'ands. *He puts his hand sentimentally on Morell's shoulder.*

MORELL: *looking up at him thoughtfully.* Look here, Burgess. Do you want to be as welcome here as you were before you lost that contract?

BURGESS: I do, James. I do—honest.

MORELL: Then why don't you behave as you did then?

BURGESS: *cautiously removing his hand.* 'Ow d'y'mean?

MORELL: I'll tell you. You thought me a young fool then.

BURGESS: *coaxingly.* No, I didn't, James. I—

MORELL: *cutting him short.* Yes, you did. And I thought you an old scoundrel.

BURGESS: *most vehemently deprecating this gross self-accusation on Morell's part.* No, you didn't, James. Now you do yourself a hinjustice.

MORELL: Yes, I did. Well, that did not prevent our getting on very well together. God made you what I call a scoundrel as he made me what you call a fool. *(The effect of this observation on Burgess is to remove the keystone of his moral arch. He becomes bodily weak, and, with his eyes fixed on Morell in a helpless stare, puts out his hand apprehensively to balance himself, as if the floor had suddenly sloped under him. Morell proceeds in the same tone of quiet conviction.)* It was not for me to quarrel with his handiwork in the one case more than in the other. So long as you come here honestly as a self-respecting, thorough, convinced scoundrel, justifying your scoundrelism, and proud of it, you are welcome. But *and now Morell's tone becomes formidable; and he rises and strikes the back of the chair for greater emphasis* I won't have you here snivelling about being a model employer and a converted man when you're only an apostate with your coat turned for the sake of a County Council contract. *He nods at him to enforce the point; then goes to the hearth-rug, where he takes up a comfortably commanding position with his back to the fire, and continues* No: I like a man to be true to himself, even in wickedness. Come now: either take your hat and go; or else sit down and give me a good scoundrelly reason for wanting to be friends with me. *(Burgess, whose emotions have subsided sufficiently to be expressed by a dazed grin, is relieved by this concrete proposition. He ponders it for a moment, and then, slowly and very modestly, sits down in the chair Morell has just left.)* That's right. Now, out with it.

BURGESS: *chuckling in spite of himself.* Well, you ARE a queer bird, James, and no mistake. But *almost enthusiastically* one carnt 'elp likin' you; besides, as I said afore, of course one don't take all a clorgyman says seriously, or the world couldn't go on. Could it now? *He composes himself for graver discourse, and turning his eyes on Morell proceeds with dull seriousness.* Well, I don't mind tellin' you, since it's your wish we should be free with one another, that I did think you a bit of a fool once; but I'm beginnin' to think that p'r'aps I was be'ind the times a bit.

MORELL: *delighted.* Aha! You're finding that out at last, are you?

BURGESS: *portentously.* Yes, times 'as changed mor'n I could a believed. Five yorr *year* ago, no sensible man would a thought o' takin' up with your ideas. I hused to wonder you was let preach at all. Why, I know a clorgyman that 'as bin kep' hout of his job for yorrs by the Bishop of London, although the pore feller's not a bit more religious than you are. But to-day, if henyone was to offer to bet me a thousan' poun' that you'll end by bein' a bishop yourself, I shouldn't venture to take the bet. You and yore crew are gettin' hinfluential: I can see that. They'll 'ave to give you something someday, if it's only to stop yore mouth. You 'ad the right instinc' arter all, James: the line you took is the payin' line in the long run fur a man o' your sort.

MORELL: *decisively—offering his hand.* Shake hands, Burgess. Now you're talking honestly. I don't think they'll make me a bishop; but if they do, I'll introduce you to the biggest jobbers I can get to come to my dinner parties.

BURGESS: *who has risen with a sheepish grin and accepted the hand of friendship.* You will 'ave your joke, James. Our quarrel's made up now, isn't it?

A WOMAN'S VOICE: Say yes, James.

Startled, they turn quickly and find that Candida has just come in, and is looking at them with an amused maternal indulgence which is her characteristic expression. She is a woman of 33, well built, well nourished, likely, one guesses, to become matronly later on, but now quite at her best, with the double charm of youth and motherhood. Her ways are those of a woman who has found that she can always manage people by engaging their affection, and who does so frankly and instinctively without the smallest scruple. So far, she is like any other pretty woman who is just clever enough to make the most of her sexual attractions for trivially selfish ends; but Candida's serene brow, courageous eyes, and well set mouth and chin signify largeness of mind and dignity of character to ennoble her cunning in the affections. A wisehearted observer, looking at her, would at once guess that whoever had placed the Virgin of the Assumption over her hearth did so because he fancied some spiritual resemblance between them, and yet would not suspect either her husband or herself of any such idea, or indeed of any concern with the art of Titian.

Just now she is in bonnet and mantle, laden with a strapped rug with her umbrella stuck through it, a handbag, and a supply of illustrated papers.

MORELL: *shocked at his remissness.* Candida! Why—[looks at his watch, and is horrified to find it so late.] My darling! *Hurrying to her and seizing the rug strap, pouring forth his remorseful regrets all the time.* I intended to meet you at the train. I let the time slip. *Flinging the rug on the sofa.* I was so engrossed by—[returning to her]—I forgot—oh![He embraces her with penitent emotion.]

BURGESS: *a little shamefaced and doubtful of his reception.* How ors you, Candy? *She, still in Morell's arms, offers him her cheek, which he kisses.* James and me is come to a unnerstandin'—a honourable unnerstandin'. Ain' we, James?

MORELL: *impetuously.* Oh, bother your understanding! You've kept me late for Candida. *With compassionate fervor.* My poor love: how did you manage about the luggage?—how—

CANDIDA: *stopping him and disengaging herself.* There, there, there. I wasn't alone. Eugene came down yesterday; and we traveled up together.

MORELL: *pleased.* Eugene!

CANDIDA: Yes: he's struggling with my luggage, poor boy. Go out, dear, at once; or he will pay for the cab; and I don't want that. *Morell hurries out. Candida puts down her handbag; then takes off her mantle and bonnet and puts them on the sofa with the rug, chatting meanwhile.* Well, papa, how are you getting on at home?

BURGESS: The 'ouse ain't worth livin' in since you left it, Candy. I wish you'd come round and give the gurl a talkin' to. Who's this Eugene that's come with you?

CANDIDA: Oh, Eugene's one of James's discoveries. He found him sleeping on the Embankment last June. Haven't you noticed our new picture *pointing to the Virgin?* He gave us that.

BURGESS: *incredulously.* Garn! D'you mean to tell me—your own father!—that cab touts or such like, orf the Embankment, buys pictur's like that? *Severely.* Don't deceive me, Candy: it's a 'lgh Church pictur; and James chose it hisself.

CANDIDA: Guess again. Eugene isn't a cab tout.

BURGESS: Then wot is he? *Sarcastically.* A nobleman, I 'spose.

CANDIDA: *delighted—nodding.* Yes. His uncle's a peer—a real live earl.

BURGESS: *not daring to believe such good news.* No!

CANDIDA: Yes. He had a seven day bill for 55 pounds in his pocket when James found him on the Embankment. He thought he couldn't get any money for it until the seven days were up; and he was too shy to ask for credit. Oh, he's a dear boy! We are very fond of him.

BURGESS: *pretending to belittle the aristocracy, but with his eyes gleaming.* Hm, I thort you wouldn't git a piorr's *peer's* nevvy visitin' in Victoria Park unless he were a bit of a flat. *Looking again at the picture.* Of course I don't 'old with that pictur, Candy; but still it's a 'igh class, fust rate work of art: I can see that. Be sure you hintroduce me to him, Candy. *He looks at his watch anxiously.* I can only stay about two minutes.

Morell comes back with Eugene, whom Burgess contemplates moist-eyed with enthusiasm. He is a strange, shy youth of eighteen, slight, effeminate, with a delicate childish voice, and a hunted, tormented expression and shrinking manner that show the painful sensitiveness that very swift and acute apprehensiveness produces in youth, before the character has grown to its full strength. Yet everything that his timidity and frailty suggests is contradicted by his face. He is miserably irresolute, does not know where to stand or what to do with his hands and feet, is afraid of Burgess, and would run away into solitude if he dared; but the very intensity with which he feels a perfectly commonplace position shows great nervous force, and his nostrils and mouth show a fiercely petulant wilfulness, as to the quality of which his great imaginative eyes and fine brow are reassuring. He is so entirely uncommon as to be almost unearthly; and to prosaic people there is something noxious in this unearthliness, just as to poetic people there is something angelic in it. His dress is anarchic. He wears an old blue serge jacket, unbuttoned over a woollen lawn tennis shirt, with a silk handkerchief for a cravat, trousers matching the jacket, and brown canvas shoes. In these garments he has apparently lain in the heather and waded through the waters; but there is no evidence of his having ever brushed them.

As he catches sight of a stranger on entering, he stops, and edges along the wall on the opposite side of the room.

MORELL: *as he enters.* Come along: you can spare us quarter of an hour, at all events. This is my father-in-law, Mr. Burgess—Mr. Marchbanks.

MARCHBANKS: *nervously backing against the bookcase.* Glad to meet you, sir.

BURGESS: *crossing to him with great heartiness, whilst Morell joins Candida at the fire.* Glad to meet YOU, I'm shore, Mr. Morchbanks. *Forcing him to shake hands.* 'Ow do you find yoreself this weather? 'Ope you ain't lettin' James put no foolish ideas into your 'ed?

MARCHBANKS: Foolish ideas! Oh, you mean Socialism. No.

BURGESS: That's right. *Again looking at his watch.* Well, I must go now: there's no 'elp for it. Yo're not comin' my way, are you, Mr. Morchbanks?

MARCHBANKS: Which way is that?

BURGESS: Victawriar Pork station. There's a city train at 12.25.

MORELL: Nonsense. Eugene will stay to lunch with us, I expect.

MARCHBANKS: *anxiously excusing. himself.* No—I—I—

BURGESS: Well, well, I shan't press you: I bet you'd rather lunch with Candy. Some night, I 'ope, you'll come and dine with me at my club, the Freeman Founders in Nortn Folgit. Come, say you will.

MARCHBANKS: Thank you, Mr. Burgess. Where is Norton Folgate—down in Surrey, isn't it? *Burgess, inexpressibly tickled, begins to splutter with laughter.*

CANDIDA: *coming to the rescue.* You'll lose your train, papa, if you don't go at once. Come back in the afternoon and tell Mr. Marchbanks where to find the club.

BURGESS: *roaring with glee.* Down in Surrey—har, har! that's not a bad one. Well, I never met a man as didn't know Nortn Folgit before.[Abashed at his own noisiness.] Good-bye, Mr. Morchbanks: I know yo're too 'ighbred to take my pleasantry in bad part. *He again offers his hand.*

MARCHBANKS: *taking it with a nervous jerk.* Not at all.

BURGESS: Bye, bye, Candy. I'll look in again later on. So long, James.

MORELL: Must you go?

BURGESS: Don't stir. *He goes out with unabated heartiness.*

MORELL: Oh, I'll see you out. *He follows him out. Eugene stares after them apprehensively, holding his breath until Burgess disappears.*

CANDIDA: *laughing.* Well, Eugene. *He turns with a start and comes eagerly towards her, but stops irresolutely as he meets her amused look.* What do you think of my father?

MARCHBANKS: I—I hardly know him yet. He seems to be a very nice old gentleman.

CANDIDA: *with gentle irony.* And you'll go to the Freeman Founders to dine with him, won't you?

MARCHBANKS: *miserably, taking it quite seriously.* Yes, if it will please you.

CANDIDA: *touched.* Do you know, you are a very nice boy, Eugene, with all your queerness. If you had laughed at my father I shouldn't have minded; but I like you ever so much better for being nice to him.

MARCHBANKS: Ought I to have laughed? I noticed that he said something funny; but I am so ill at ease with strangers; and I never can see a joke! I'm very sorry. *He sits down on the sofa, his elbows on his knees and his temples between his fists, with an expression of hopeless suffering.*

CANDIDA: *bustling him goodnaturedly.* Oh, come! You great baby, you! You are worse than usual this morning. Why were you so melancholy as we came along in the cab?

MARCHBANKS: Oh, that was nothing. I was wondering how much I ought to give the cabman. I know it's utterly silly; but you don't know how dreadful such things are to me—how I shrink from having to deal with strange people. *Quickly and reassuringly.* But it's all right. He beamed all over and touched his hat when Morell gave him two shillings. I was on the point of offering him ten. *Candida laughs heartily. Morell comes back with a few letters and newspapers which have come by the midday post.*

CANDIDA: Oh, James, dear, he was going to give the cabman ten shillings—ten shillings for a three minutes' drive—oh, dear!

MORELL: *at the table, glancing through the letters.* Never mind her, Marchbanks. The overpaying instinct is a generous one: better than the underpaying instinct, and not so common.

MARCHBANKS: *relapsing into dejection.* No: cowardice, incompetence. Mrs. Morell's quite right.

CANDIDA: Of course she is. *She takes up her handbag.* And now I must leave you to James for the present. I suppose you are too much of a poet to know the state a woman finds her house in when she's been away for three weeks. Give me my rug. *Eugene takes the strapped rug from the couch, and gives it to her. She takes it in her left hand, having the bag in her right.* Now hang my cloak across my arm. *He obeys.* Now my hat. *He puts it into the hand which has the bag.* Now open the door for me. *He hurries up before her and opens the door.* Thanks. *She goes out; and Marchbanks shuts the door.*

MORELL: *still busy at the table.* You'll stay to lunch, Marchbanks, of course.

MARCHBANKS: *scared.* I mustn't. *He glances quickly at Morell, but at once avoids his frank look, and adds, with obvious disingenuousness* I can't.

MORELL: *over his shoulder.* You mean you won't.

MARCHBANKS: *earnestly.* No: I should like to, indeed. Thank you very much. But—but—

MORELL: *breezily, finishing with the letters and coming close to him.* But—but—but—but—but—but if you'd like to stay, stay. You don't mean to persuade me you have anything else to do. If you're shy, go and take a turn in the park and write poetry until half past one; and then come in and have a good feed.

MARCHBANKS: Thank you, I should like that very much. But I really mustn't. The truth is, Mrs. Morell told me not to. She said she didn't think you'd ask me to stay to lunch, but that I was to remember, if you did, that you didn't really want me to. *Plaintively.* She said I'd understand; but I don't. Please don't tell her I told you.

MORELL: *drolly.* Oh, is that all? Won't my suggestion that you should take a turn in the park meet the difficulty?

MARCHBANKS: How?

MORELL: *exploding good-humoredly.* Why, you duffer—[But this boisterousness jars himself as well as Eugene. He checks himself, and resumes, with affectionate seriousness] No: I won't put it in that way. My dear lad: in a happy marriage like ours, there is something very sacred in the return of the wife to her home. *Marchbanks looks quickly at him, half anticipating his meaning.* An old friend or a truly noble and sympathetic soul is not in the way on such occasions; but a chance visitor is. *The hunted, horrors-tricken expression comes out with sudden vividness in Eugene's face as he understands. Morell, occupied with his own thought, goes on without noticing it.* Candida thought I would rather not have you here; but she was wrong. I'm very fond of you, my boy, and I should like you to see for yourself what a happy thing it is to be married as I am.

MARCHBANKS: Happy!—YOUR marriage! You think that! You believe that!

MORELL: *buoyantly.* I know it, my lad. La Rochefoucauld said that there are convenient marriages, but no delightful ones. You don't know the comfort of seeing through and through a thundering liar and rotten cynic like that fellow. Ha, ha! Now off with you to the park, and write your poem. Half past one, sharp, mind: we never wait for anybody.

MARCHBANKS: *wildly.* No: stop: you shan't. I'll force it into the light.

MORELL: *puzzled.* Eh? Force what?

MARCHBANKS: I must speak to you. There is something that must be settled between us.

MORELL: *with a whimsical glance at the clock.* Now?

MARCHBANKS: *passionately.* Now. Before you leave this room. *He retreats a few steps, and stands as if to bar Morell's way to the door.*

MORELL: *without moving, and gravely, perceiving now that there is something serious the matter.* I'm not going to leave it, my dear boy: I thought YOU were. *Eugene, baffled by his firm tone, turns his back on him, writhing with anger. Morell goes to him and puts his hand on his shoulder strongly and kindly, disregarding his attempt to shake it off* Come: sit down quietly; and tell me what it is. And remember; we are friends, and need not fear that either of us will be anything but patient and kind to the other, whatever we may have to say.

MARCHBANKS: *twisting himself round on him.* Oh, I am not forgetting myself: I am only *covering his face desperately with his hands* full of horror. *Then, dropping his hands, and thrusting his face forward fiercely at Morell, he goes on threateningly.* You shall see whether this is a time for patience and kindness. *Morell, firm as a rock, looks indulgently at him.* Don't look at me in that self-complacent way. You think yourself stronger than I am; but I shall stagger you if you have a heart in your breast.

MORELL: *powerfully confident.* Stagger me, my boy. Out with it.

MARCHBANKS: First—

MORELL: First?

MARCHBANKS: I love your wife. *(Morell recoils, and, after staring at him for a moment in utter amazement, bursts into uncontrollable laughter. Eugene is taken aback, but not disconcerted; and he soon becomes indignant and contemptuous.)*

MORELL: *sitting down to have his laugh out.* Why, my dear child, of course you do. Everybody loves her: they can't help it. I like it. But *looking up whimsically at him* I say, Eugene: do you think yours is a case to be talked about? You're under twenty: she's over thirty. Doesn't it look rather too like a case of calf love?

MARCHBANKS: *vehemently.* YOU dare say that of her! You think that way of the love she inspires! It is an insult to her!

MORELL: *rising; quickly, in an altered tone.* To her! Eugene: take care. I have been patient. I hope to remain patient. But there are some things I won't allow. Don't force me to show you the indulgence I should show to a child. Be a man.

MARCHBANKS: *with a gesture as if sweeping something behind him.* Oh, let us put aside all that cant. It horrifies me when I think of the doses of it she has had to endure in all the weary years during which you have selfishly and blindly sacrificed her to minister to your self-sufficiency—YOU *turning on him* who have not one thought—one sense—in common with her.

MORELL: *philosophically.* She seems to bear it pretty well. *Looking him straight in the face.* Eugene, my boy: you are making a fool of yourself—a very great fool of yourself. There's a piece of wholesome plain speaking for you.

MARCHBANKS: Oh, do you think I don't know all that? Do you think that the things people make fools of themselves about are any less real and true than the things they behave sensibly about? *Morell's gaze wavers for the first time. He instinctively averts his face and stands listening, startled and thoughtful.* They are more true: they are the only things that are true. You are very calm and sensible and moderate with me because you can see that I am a fool about your wife; just as no doubt that old man who was here just now is very wise over your socialism, because he sees that YOU are a fool about it. *Morell's perplexity deepens markedly. Eugene follows up his advantage, plying him fiercely with questions.* Does that prove you wrong? Does your complacent superiority to me prove that I am wrong?

MORELL: *turning on Eugene, who stands his ground.* Marchbanks: some devil is putting these words into your mouth. It is easy—terribly easy—to shake a man's faith in himself. To take advantage of that to break a man's spirit is devil's work. Take care of what you are doing. Take care.

MARCHBANKS: *ruthlessly.* I know. I'm doing it on purpose. I told you I should stagger you. *They confront one another threateningly for a moment. Then Morell recovers his dignity.*

MORELL: *with noble tenderness.* Eugene: listen to me. Some day, I hope and trust, you will be a happy man like me. *Eugene chafes intolerantly, repudiating the worth of his happiness. Morell, deeply insulted, controls himself with fine forbearance, and continues steadily, with great artistic beauty of delivery* You will be married; and you will be working with all your might and valor to make every spot on earth as happy as your own home. You will be one of the makers of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth; and —who knows?—you may be a pioneer and master builder where I am only a humble journeyman; for don't think, my boy, that I cannot see in you, young as you are, promise of higher powers than I can ever pretend to. I well know that it is in the poet that the holy spirit of man—the god within him—is most godlike. It should make you tremble to think of that—to think that the heavy burthen and great gift of a poet may be laid upon you.

MARCHBANKS: *unimpressed and remorseless, his boyish crudity of assertion telling sharply against Morell's oratory.* It does not make me tremble. It is the want of it in others that makes me tremble.

MORELL: *redoubling his force of style under the stimulus of his genuine feeling and Eugene's obduracy.* Then help to kindle it in them—in ME—not to extinguish it. In the future—when you are as happy as I am—I will be your true brother in the faith. I will help you to believe that God has given us a world that nothing but our own folly keeps from being a paradise. I will help you to believe that every stroke of your work is sowing happiness for the great harvest that all—even the humblest—shall one day reap. And last, but trust me, not least, I will help you to believe that your wife loves you and is happy in her home. We need such help, Marchbanks: we need it greatly and always. There are so many things to make us doubt, if once we let our understanding be troubled. Even at home, we sit as if in camp, encompassed by a hostile army of doubts. Will you play the traitor and let them in on me?

MARCHBANKS: *looking round him.* Is it like this for her here always? A woman, with a great soul, craving for reality, truth, freedom, and being fed on metaphors, sermons, stale perorations, mere rhetoric. Do you think a woman's soul can live on your talent for preaching?

MORELL: *Stung.* Marchbanks: you make it hard for me to control myself. My talent is like yours insofar as it has any real worth at all. It is the gift of finding words for divine truth.

MARCHBANKS: *impetuously.* It's the gift of the gab, nothing more and nothing less. What has your knack of fine talking to do with the truth, any more than playing the organ has? I've never been in your church; but I've been to your political meetings; and I've seen you do what's called rousing the meeting to enthusiasm: that is, you excited them until they behaved exactly as if they were drunk. And their wives looked on and saw clearly enough what fools they were. Oh, it's an old story: you'll find it in the Bible. I imagine King David, in his fits of enthusiasm, was very like you. *Stabbing him with the words.* "But his wife despised him in her heart."

MORELL: *wrathfully.* Leave my house. Do you hear? *He advances on him threateningly.*

MARCHBANKS: *shrinking back against the couch.* Let me alone. Don't touch me. *Morell grasps him powerfully by the lappell of his coat: he cowers down on the sofa and screams passionately.* Stop, Morell, if you strike me, I'll kill myself. I won't bear it. *Almost in hysterics.* Let me go. Take your hand away.

MORELL: *with slow, emphatic scorn.* You little snivelling, cowardly whelp. *Releasing him.* Go, before you frighten yourself into a fit.

MARCHBANKS: *on the sofa, gasping, but relieved by the withdrawal of Morell's hand.* I'm not afraid of you: it's you who are afraid of me.

MORELL: *quietly, as he stands over him.* It looks like it, doesn't it?

MARCHBANKS: *with petulant vehemence.* Yes, it does. *Morell turns away contemptuously. Eugene scrambles to his feet and follows him.* You think because I shrink from being brutally handled—because *with tears in his voice* I can do nothing but cry with rage when I am met with violence—because I can't lift a heavy trunk down from the top of a cab like you—because I can't fight you for your wife as a navvy would: all that makes you think that I'm afraid of you. But you're wrong. If I haven't got what you call British pluck, I haven't British cowardice either: I'm not afraid of a clergyman's ideas. I'll fight your ideas. I'll rescue her from her slavery to them: I'll pit my own ideas against them. You are driving me out of the house because you daren't let her choose between your ideas and mine. You are afraid to let me see her again. *Morell, angered, turns suddenly on him. He flies to the door in involuntary dread.* Let me alone, I say. I'm going.

MORELL: *with cold scorn.* Wait a moment: I am not going to touch you: don't be afraid. When my wife

comes back she will want to know why you have gone. And when she finds that you are never going to cross our threshold again, she will want to have that explained, too. Now I don't wish to distress her by telling her that you have behaved like a blackguard.

MARCHBANKS: *Coming back with renewed vehemence.* You shall—you must. If you give any explanation but the true one, you are a liar and a coward. Tell her what I said; and how you were strong and manly, and shook me as a terrier shakes a rat; and how I shrank and was terrified; and how you called me a snivelling little whelp and put me out of the house. If you don't tell her, I will: I'll write to her.

MORELL: *taken aback.* Why do you want her to know this?

MARCHBANKS: *with lyric rapture.* Because she will understand me, and know that I understand her. If you keep back one word of it from her—if you are not ready to lay the truth at her feet as I am—then you will know to the end of your days that she really belongs to me and not to you. Good-bye. *Going.*

MORELL: *terribly disquieted.* Stop: I will not tell her.

MARCHBANKS: *turning near the door.* Either the truth or a lie you MUST tell her, if I go.

MORELL: *temporizing.* Marchbanks: it is sometimes justifiable.

MARCHBANKS: *cutting him short.* I know—to die. It will be useless. Good-bye, Mr. Clergyman. *As he turns finally to the door, it opens and Candida enters in housekeeping attire.*

CANDIDA: Are you going, Eugene?[Looking more observantly at him.] Well, dear me, just look at you, going out into the street in that state! You ARE a poet, certainly. Look at him, James! *She takes him by the coat, and brings him forward to show him to Morell.* Look at his collar! look at his tie! look at his hair! One would think somebody had been throttling you. *The two men guard themselves against betraying their consciousness.* Here! Stand still. *She buttons his collar; ties his neckerchief in a bow; and arranges his hair.* There! Now you look so nice that I think you'd better stay to lunch after all, though I told you you mustn't. It will be ready in half an hour. *She puts a final touch to the bow. He kisses her hand.* Don't be silly.

MARCHBANKS: I want to stay, of course—unless the reverend gentleman, your husband, has anything to advance to the contrary.

CANDIDA: Shall he stay, James, if he promises to be a good boy and to help me to lay the table? *Marchbanks turns his head and looks steadfastly at Morell over his shoulder, challenging his answer.*

MORELL: *shortly.* Oh, yes, certainly: he had better. *He goes to the table and pretends to busy himself with his papers there.*

MARCHBANKS: *offering his arm to Candida.* Come and lay the table.[She takes it and they go to the door together. As they go out he adds] I am the happiest of men.

MORELL: So was I—an hour ago.

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

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