Candida - Act II

di George Bernard Shaw (1898)

ACT II

The same day. The same room. Late in the afternoon. The spare chair for visitors has been replaced at the table, which is, if possible, more untidy than before. Marchbanks, alone and idle, is trying to find out how the typewriter works. Hearing someone at the door, he steals guiltily away to the window and pretends to be absorbed in the view. Miss Garnett, carrying the notebook in which she takes down Morell's letters in shorthand from his dictation, sits down at the typewriter and sets to work transcribing them, much too busy to notice Eugene. Unfortunately the first key she strikes sticks.

PROSERPINE: Bother! You've been meddling with my typewriter, Mr. Marchbanks; and there's not the least use in your trying to look as if you hadn't.

MARCHBANKS:*timidly.* I'm very sorry, Miss Garnett. I only tried to make it write.

PROSERPINE: Well, you've made this key stick.

MARCHBANKS:*earnestly.* I assure you I didn't touch the keys. I didn't, indeed. I only turned a little wheel. *He points irresolutely at the tension wheel.*

PROSERPINE: Oh, now I understand. *She sets the machine to rights, talking volubly all the time.* I suppose you thought it was a sort of barrel-organ. Nothing to do but turn the handle, and it would write a beautiful love letter for you straight off, eh?

MARCHBANKS:*seriously.* I suppose a machine could be made to write love-letters. They're all the same, aren't they!

PROSERPINE: *somewhat indignantly: any such discussion, except by way of pleasantry, being outside her code of manners.* How do I know? Why do you ask me?

MARCHBANKS:I beg your pardon. I thought clever people—peoplewho can do business and write letters, and that sort of thing—always had love affairs.

PROSERPINE: *rising, outraged.* Mr. Marchbanks! *She looks severely at him, and marches with much dignity to the bookcase.*

MARCHBANKS:*approaching her humbly.* I hope I haven't offended you. Perhaps I shouldn't have alluded to your love affairs.

PROSERPINE: *plucking a blue book from the shelf and turning sharply on him.* I haven't any love affairs. How dare you say such a thing?

MARCHBANKS:*simply.* Really! Oh, then you are shy, like me. Isn't that so?

PROSERPINE: Certainly I am not shy. What do you mean?

MARCHBANKS:*secretly.* You must be: that is the reason there are so few love affairs in the world. We all go about longing for love: it is the first need of our natures, the loudest cry of our hearts; but we dare not utter our longing: we are too shy. *Very earnestly.* Oh, Miss Garnett, what would you not give to be without fear, without shame—

PROSERPINE: *scandalized,* Well, upon my word!

MARCHBANKS:*with petulant impatience.* Ah, don't say those stupid things to me: they don't deceive me: what use are they? Why are you afraid to be your real self with me? I am just like you.

PROSERPINE: Like me! Pray, are you flattering me or flattering yourself? I don't feel quite sure which.

She turns to go back to the typewriter.

MARCHBANKS: *stopping her mysteriously.* Hush! I go about in search of love; and I find it in unmeasured stores in the bosoms of others. But when I try to ask for it, this horrible shyness strangles me; and I stand dumb, or worse than dumb, saying meaningless things—foolish lies. And I see the affection I am longing for given to dogs and cats and pet birds, because they come and ask for it. *Almost whispering.* It must be asked for: it is like a ghost: it cannot speak unless it is first spoken to. *At his normal pitch, but with deep melancholy.* All the love in the world is longing to speak; only it dare not, because it is shy, shy, shy. That is the world's tragedy. *With a deep sigh he sits in the spare chair and buries his face in his hands.*

PROSERPINE: *amazed, but keeping her wits about her—her point of honor in encounters with strange young men.* Wicked people get over that shyness occasionally, don't they?

MARCHBANKS: *scrambling up almost fiercely.* Wicked people means people who have no love: therefore they have no shame. They have the power to ask love because they don't need it: they have the power to offer it because they have none to give. *He collapses into his seat, and adds, mournfully* But we, who have love, and long to mingle it with the love of others: we cannot utter a word. *Timidly.* You find that, don't you?

PROSERPINE: Look here: if you don't stop talking like this, I'll leave the room, Mr. Marchbanks: I really will. It's not proper. *She resumes her seat at the typewriter, opening the blue book and preparing to copy a passage from it.*

MARCHBANKS: *hopelessly.* Nothing that's worth saying IS proper. *He rises, and wanders about the room in his lost way, saying* I can't understand you, Miss Garnett. What am I to talk about?

PROSERPINE: *snubbing him.* Talk about indifferent things, talk about the weather.

MARCHBANKS: Would you stand and talk about indifferent things if a child were by, crying bitterly with hunger?

PROSERPINE: I suppose not.

MARCHBANKS: Well: I can't talk about indifferent things with my heart crying out bitterly in ITS hunger.

PROSERPINE: Then hold your tongue.

MARCHBANKS: Yes: that is what it always comes to. We hold our tongues. Does that stop the cry of your heart?—for it does cry: doesn't it? It must, if you have a heart.

PROSERPINE: *suddenly rising with her hand pressed on her heart.* Oh, it's no use trying to work while you talk like that. *She leaves her little table and sits on the sofa. Her feelings are evidently strongly worked on.* It's no business of yours, whether my heart cries or not; but I have a mind to tell you, for all that.

MARCHBANKS: You needn't. I know already that it must.

PROSERPINE: But mind: if you ever say I said so, I'll deny it.

MARCHBANKS: *compassionately.* Yes, I know. And so you haven't the courage to tell him?

PROSERPINE: *bouncing up.* HIM! Who?

MARCHBANKS: Whoever he is. The man you love. It might be anybody. The curate, Mr. Mill, perhaps.

PROSERPINE: *with disdain.* Mr. Mill!!! A fine man to break my heart about, indeed! I'd rather have you than Mr. Mill.

MARCHBANKS: *recoiling.* No, really—I'm very sorry; but you mustn't think of that. I—

PROSERPINE: *testily, crossing to the fire and standing at it with her back to him.* Oh, don't be

frightened: it's not you. It's not any one particular person.

MARCHBANKS: I know. You feel that you could love anybody that offered—

PROSERPINE: *exasperated.* Anybody that offered! No, I do not. What do you take me for?

MARCHBANKS: *discouraged.* No use. You won't make me REAL answers —only those things that everybody says, *He strays to the sofa and sits down disconsolately.*

PROSERPINE: *nettled at what she takes to be a disparagement of her manners by an aristocrat.* Oh, well, if you want original conversation, you'd better go and talk to yourself.

MARCHBANKS: That is what all poets do: they talk to themselves out loud; and the world overhears them. But it's horribly lonely not to hear someone else talk sometimes.

PROSERPINE: Wait until Mr. Morell comes. HE'LL talk to you. *Marchbanks shudders.* Oh, you needn't make wry faces over him: he can talk better than you. *With temper.* He'd talk your little head off. *She is going back angrily to her place, when, suddenly enlightened, he springs up and stops her.*

MARCHBANKS: Ah, I understand now!

PROSERPINE: *reddening.* What do you understand?

MARCHBANKS: Your secret. Tell me: is it really and truly possible for a woman to love him?

PROSERPINE: *as if this were beyond all bounds.* Well!!

MARCHBANKS: *passionately.* No, answer me. I want to know: I MUST know. I can't understand it. I can see nothing in him but words, pious resolutions, what people call goodness. You can't love that.

PROSERPINE: *attempting to snub him by an air of cool propriety.* I simply don't know what you're talking about. I don't understand you.

MARCHBANKS: *vehemently.* You do. You lie—

PROSERPINE: Oh!

MARCHBANKS: You DO understand; and you KNOW. *Determined to have an answer.* Is it possible for a woman to love him?

PROSERPINE: *(looking him straight in the face. Yes. He covers his face with his hands. Whatever is the matter with you! (He takes down his hands and looks at her. Frightened at the tragic mask presented to her, she hurries past him at the utmost possible distance, keeping her eyes on his face until he turns from her and goes to the child's chair beside the hearth, where he sits in the deepest dejection. As she approaches the door, it opens and Burgess enters. On seeing him, she ejaculates) Praise heaven, here's somebody! and sits down, reassured, at her table. She puts a fresh sheet of paper into the typewriter as Burgess crosses to Eugene.*

BURGESS: *bent on taking care of the distingished visitor.* Well: so this is the way they leave you to yourself, Mr. Morchbanks. I've come to keep you company. *Marchbanks looks up at him in consternation, which is quite lost on him.* James is receivin' a deppitation in the dinin' room; and Candy is hupstairs educatin' of a young stitcher gurl she's hinterusted in. She's settin' there learnin' her to read out of the "'Ev'nly Twins." *Condolingly.* You must find it lonesome here with no one but the typist to talk to. *He pulls round the easy chair above fire, and sits down.*

PROSERPINE: *highly incensed.* He'll be all right now that he has the advantage of YOUR polished conversation: that's one comfort, anyhow. *She begins to typewrite with clattering asperity.*

BURGESS: *amazed at her audacity.* Hi was not addressin' myself to you, young woman, that I'm awerr of.

PROSERPINE: *tartly, to Marchbanks.* Did you ever see worse manners, Mr. Marchbanks?

BURGESS: *with pompous severity.* Mr. Morchbanks is a gentleman and knows his place, which is more than some people do.

PROSERPINE: *fretfully.* It's well you and I are not ladies and gentlemen: I'd talk to you pretty straight if Mr. Marchbanks wasn't here. *She pulls the letter out of the machine so crossly that it tears.* There, now I've spoiled this letter—have to be done all over again. Oh, I can't contain myself—silly old fathead!

BURGESS: *rising, breathless with indignation.* Ho! I'm a silly ole fathead, am I? Ho, indeed *gasping.* Hall right, my gurl! Hall right. You just wait till I tell that to your employer. You'll see. I'll teach you: see if I don't.

PROSERPINE: I—

BURGESS: *cutting her short.* No, you've done it now. No huse a-talkin' to me. I'll let you know who I am. *Proserpine shifts her paper carriage with a defiant bang, and disdainfully goes on with her work.* Don't you take no notice of her, Mr. Morchbanks. She's beneath it. *He sits down again loftily.*

MARCHBANKS: *miserably nervous and disconcerted.* Hadn't we better change the subject. I—I don't think Miss Garnett meant anything.

PROSERPINE: *with intense conviction.* Oh, didn't I though, just!

BURGESS: I wouldn't demean myself to take notice on her. *An electric bell rings twice.*

PROSERPINE: *gathering up her note-book and papers.* That's for me. *She hurries out.*

BURGESS: *calling after her.* Oh, we can spare you. *(Somewhat relieved by the triumph of having the last word, and yet half inclined to try to improve on it, he looks after her for a moment; then subsides into his seat by Eugene, and addresses him very confidentially.)* Now we're alone, Mr. Morchbanks, let me give you a friendly 'int that I wouldn't give to everybody. 'Ow long 'ave you known my son-in-law James here?

MARCHBANKS: I don't know. I never can remember dates. A few months, perhaps.

BURGESS: Ever notice anything queer about him?

MARCHBANKS: I don't think so.

BURGESS: *impressively.* No more you wouldn't. That's the danger in it. Well, he's mad.

MARCHBANKS: Mad!

BURGESS: Mad as a Morch 'are. You take notice on him and you'll see.

MARCHBANKS: *beginning.* But surely that is only because his opinions—

BURGESS: *touching him with his forefinger on his knee, and pressing it as if to hold his attention with it.* That's wot I used tee think, Mr. Morchbanks. Hi thought long enough that it was honly 'is hopinions; though, mind you, hopinions becomes vurry serious things when people takes to hactin on 'em as 'e does. But that's not wot I go on. *He looks round to make sure that they are alone, and bends over to Eugene's ear.* Wot do you think he says to me this mornin' in this very room?

MARCHBANKS: What?

BURGESS: He sez to me—this is as sure as we're settin' here now—he sez: "I'm a fool," he sez;—"and yore a scounderl"—as cool as possible. Me a scounderl, mind you! And then shook 'ands with me on it, as if it was to my credit! Do you mean to tell me that that man's sane?

MORELL: *outside, calling to Proserpine, holding the door open.* Get all their names and addresses, Miss Garnett.

PROSERPINE: *in the distance.* Yes, Mr. Morell. *Morell comes in, with the deputation's documents in his hands.*

BURGESS: *aside to Marchbanks.* Yorr he is. Just you keep your heye on him and see. *Rising momentously.* I'm sorry, James, to 'ave to make a complaint to you. I don't want to do it; but I feel I oughter, as a matter o' right and duty.

MORELL: What's the matter?

BURGESS: Mr. Morchbanks will bear me out: he was a witness. *Very solemnly.* Your young woman so far forgot herself as to call me a silly ole fat 'ead.

MORELL: *delighted—with tremendous heartiness.* Oh, now, isn't that EXACTLY like Prossy? She's so frank: she can't contain herself! Poor Prossy! Ha! Ha!

BURGESS: *trembling with rage.* And do you hexpec me to put up with it from the like of 'ER?

MORELL: Pooh, nonsense! you can't take any notice of it. Never mind. *He goes to the cellaret and puts the papers into one of the drawers.*

BURGESS: Oh, I don't mind. I'm above it. But is it RIGHT?—that's what I want to know. Is it right?

MORELL: That's a question for the Church, not for the laity. Has it done you any harm, that's the question for you, eh? Of course, it hasn't. Think no more of it. *He dismisses the subject by going to his place at the table and setting to work at his correspondence.*

BURGESS: *aside to Marchbanks.* What did I tell you? Mad as a 'atter. *He goes to the table and asks, with the sickly civility of a hungry man* When's dinner, James?

MORELL: Not for half an hour yet.

BURGESS: *with plaintive resignation.* Gimme a nice book to read over the fire, will you, James: thur's a good chap.

MORELL: What sort of book? A good one?

BURGESS: *with almost a yell of remonstrance.* Nah-oo! Summat pleasant, just to pass the time. *Morell takes an illustrated paper from the table and offers it. He accepts it humbly.* Thank yer, James. *He goes back to his easy chair at the fire, and sits there at his ease, reading.*

MORELL: *as he writes.* Candida will come to entertain you presently. She has got rid of her pupil. She is filling the lamps.

MARCHBANKS: *starting up in the wildest consternation.* But that will soil her hands. I can't bear that, Morell: it's a shame. I'll go and fill them. *He makes for the door.*

MORELL: You'd better not. *Marchbanks stops irresolutely.* She'd only set you to clean my boots, to save me the trouble of doing it myself in the morning.

BURGESS: *with grave disapproval.* Don't you keep a servant now, James?

MORELL: Yes; but she isn't a slave; and the house looks as if I kept three. That means that everyone has to lend a hand. It's not a bad plan: Prossy and I can talk business after breakfast whilst we're washing up. Washing up's no trouble when there are two people to do it.

MARCHBANKS: *tormentedly.* Do you think every woman is as coarse-grained as Miss Garnett?

BURGESS: *emphatically.* That's quite right, Mr. Morchbanks. That's quite right. She IS corse-grained.

MORELL: *quietly and significantly.* Marchbanks!

MARCHBANKS: Yes.

MORELL: How many servants does your father keep?

MARCHBANKS: Oh, I don't know. *He comes back uneasily to the sofa, as if to get as far as possible from Morell's questioning, and sits down in great agony of mind, thinking of the paraffin.*

MORELL: *very gravely.* So many that you don't know. *More aggressively.* Anyhow, when there's anything coarse-grained to be done, you ring the bell and throw it on to somebody else, eh? That's one of the great facts in YOUR existence, isn't it?

MARCHBANKS: Oh, don't torture me. The one great fact now is that your wife's beautiful fingers are dabbling in paraffin oil, and that you are sitting here comfortably preaching about it—everlasting preaching, preaching, words, words, words.

BURGESS: *intensely appreciating this retort.* Ha, ha! Devil a better. *Radiantly.* 'Ad you there, James, straight.

Candida comes in, well aproned, with a reading lamp trimmed, filled, and ready for lighting. She places it on the table near Morell, ready for use.

CANDIDA: *brushing her finger tips together with a slight twitch of her nose.* If you stay with us, Eugene, I think I will hand over the lamps to you.

MARCHBANKS: I will stay on condition that you hand over all the rough work to me.

CANDIDA: That's very gallant; but I think I should like to see how you do it first. *Turning to Morell.* James: you've not been looking after the house properly.

MORELL: What have I done—or not done—my love?

CANDIDA: *with serious vexation.* My own particular pet scrubbing brush has been used for blackleading. *A heart-breaking wail bursts from Marchbanks. Burgess looks round, amazed. Candida hurries to the sofa.* What's the matter? Are you ill, Eugene?

MARCHBANKS: No, not ill. Only horror, horror, horror! *He bows his head on his hands.*

BURGESS: *shocked.* What! Got the 'orrors, Mr. Morchbanks! Oh, that's bad, at your age. You must leave it off grajally.

CANDIDA: *reassured.* Nonsense, papa. It's only poetic horror, isn't it, Eugene? *Petting him.*

BURGESS: *abashed.* Oh, poetic 'orror, is it? I beg your pordon, I'm shore. *He turns to the fire again, deprecating his hasty conclusion.*

CANDIDA: What is it, Eugene—the scrubbing brush? *He shudders.* Well, there! never mind. *She sits down beside him.* Wouldn't you like to present me with a nice new one, with an ivory back inlaid with mother-of-pearl?

MARCHBANKS: *softly and musically, but sadly and longingly.* No, not a scrubbing brush, but a boat—a tiny shallop to sail away in, far from the world, where the marble floors are washed by the rain and dried by the sun, where the south wind dusts the beautiful green and purple carpets. Or a chariot—to carry us up into the sky, where the lamps are stars, and don't need to be filled with paraffin oil every day.

MORELL: *harshly.* And where there is nothing to do but to be idle, selfish and useless.

CANDIDA: *jarred.* Oh, James, how could you spoil it all!

MARCHBANKS: *firing up.* Yes, to be idle, selfish and useless: that is to be beautiful and free and happy: hasn't every man desired that with all his soul for the woman he loves? That's my ideal: what's yours, and that of all the dreadful people who live in these hideous rows of houses?

Sermons and scrubbing brushes! With you to preach the sermon and your wife to scrub.

CANDIDA: *quaintly.* He cleans the boots, Eugene. You will have to clean them to-morrow for saying that about him.

MARCHBANKS: Oh! don't talk about boots. Your feet should be beautiful on the mountains.

CANDIDA: My feet would not be beautiful on the Hackney Road without boots.

BURGESS: *scandalized.* Come, Candy, don't be vulgar. Mr. Morchbanks ain't accustomed to it. You're givin' him the 'orrors again. I mean the poetic ones.

Morell is silent. Apparently he is busy with his letters: really he is puzzling with misgiving over his new and alarming experience that the surer he is of his moral thrusts, the more swiftly and effectively Eugene parries them. To find himself beginning to fear a man whom he does not respect affects him bitterly.

Miss Garnett comes in with a telegram.

PROSERPINE: *handing the telegram to Morell.* Reply paid. The boy's waiting. *To Candida, coming back to her machine and sitting down.* Maria is ready for you now in the kitchen, Mrs. Morell. *Candida rises.* The onions have come.

MARCHBANKS: *convulsively.* Onions!

CANDIDA: Yes, onions. Not even Spanish ones—nasty little red onions. You shall help me to slice them. Come along.

She catches him by the wrist and runs out, pulling him after her. Burgess rises in consternation, and stands aghast on the hearth-rug, staring after them.

BURGESS: Candy didn't oughter 'andle a peer's nevvy like that. It's goin' too fur with it. Lookee 'ere, James: do 'e often git taken queer like that?

MORELL: *shortly, writing a telegram.* I don't know.

BURGESS: *sentimentally.* He talks very pretty. I allus had a turn for a bit of potery. Candy takes arter me that-a-way: huse ter make me tell her fairy stories when she was on'y a little kiddy not that 'igh *indicating a stature of two feet or thereabouts.*

MORELL: *preoccupied.* Ah, indeed. *He blots the telegram, and goes out.*

PROSERPINE: Used you to make the fairy stories up out of your own head?

Burgess, not deigning to reply, strikes an attitude of the haughtiest disdain on the hearth-rug.

PROSERPINE: *calmly.* I should never have supposed you had it in you. By the way, I'd better warn you, since you've taken such a fancy to Mr. Marchbanks. He's mad.

BURGESS: Mad! Wot! 'Im too!!

PROSERPINE: Mad as a March hare. He did frighten me, I can tell you just before you came in that time. Haven't you noticed the queer things he says?

BURGESS: So that's wot the poetic 'orrors means. Blame me if it didn't come into my head once or twyst that he must be off his chump! *He crosses the room to the door, lifting up his voice as he goes.* Well, this is a pretty sort of asylum for a man to be in, with no one but you to take care of him!

PROSERPINE: *as he passes her.* Yes, what a dreadful thing it would be if anything happened to YOU!

BURGESS: *loftily.* Don't you address no remarks to me. Tell your hemployer that I've gone into the garden for a smoke.

PROSERPINE: *mocking.* Oh!

Before Burgess can retort, Morell comes back.

BURGESS: *sentimentally.* Goin' for a turn in the garden to smoke, James.

MORELL: *brusquely.* Oh, all right, all right. *Burgess goes out pathetically in the character of the weary old man. Morell stands at the table, turning over his papers, and adding, across to Proserpine, half humorously, half absently* Well, Miss Prossy, why have you been calling my father-in-law names?

PROSERPINE: *blushing fiery red, and looking quickly up at him, half scared, half reproachful.* I—*She bursts into tears.*

MORELL: *with tender gaiety, leaning across the table towards her, and consoling her.* Oh, come, come, come! Never mind, Pross: he IS a silly old fathead, isn't he?

With an explosive sob, she makes a dash at the door, and vanishes, banging it. Morell, shaking his head resignedly, sighs, and goes wearily to his chair, where he sits down and sets to work, looking old and careworn.

Candida comes in. She has finished her household work and taken off the apron. She at once notices his dejected appearance, and posts herself quietly at the spare chair, looking down at him attentively; but she says nothing.

MORELL: *looking up, but with his pen raised ready to resume his work.* Well? Where is Eugene?

CANDIDA: Washing his hands in the scullery—under the tap. He will make an excellent cook if he can only get over his dread of Maria.

MORELL: *shortly.* Ha! No doubt. *He begins writing again.*

CANDIDA: *going nearer, and putting her hand down softly on his to stop him, as she says.* Come here, dear. Let me look at you. *He drops his pen and yields himself at her disposal. She makes him rise and brings him a little away from the table, looking at him critically all the time.* Turn your face to the light. *She places him facing the window.* My boy is not looking well. Has he been overworking?

MORELL: Nothing more than usual.

CANDIDA: He looks very pale, and grey, and wrinkled, and old. *His melancholy deepens; and she attacks it with wilful gaiety.* Here *pulling him towards the easy chair* you've done enough writing for to-day. Leave Prossy to finish it and come and talk to me.

MORELL: But—

CANDIDA: Yes, I MUST be talked to sometimes. *She makes him sit down, and seats herself on the carpet beside his knee.* Now *patting his hand* you're beginning to look better already. Why don't you give up all this tiresome overworking—going out every night lecturing and talking? Of course what you say is all very true and very right; but it does no good: they don't mind what you say to them one little bit. Of course they agree with you; but what's the use of people agreeing with you if they go and do just the opposite of what you tell them the moment your back is turned? Look at our congregation at St. Dominic's! Why do they come to hear you talking about Christianity every Sunday? Why, just because they've been so full of business and money-making for six days that they want to forget all about it and have a rest on the seventh, so that they can go back fresh and make money harder than ever! You positively help them at it instead of hindering them.

MORELL: *with energetic seriousness.* You know very well, Candida, that I often blow them up soundly for that. But if there is nothing in their church-going but rest and diversion, why don't they try something more amusing—more self-indulgent? There must be some good in the fact that they prefer St. Dominic's to worse places on Sundays.

CANDIDA: Oh, the worst places aren't open; and even if they were, they daren't be seen going to them. Besides, James, dear, you preach so splendidly that it's as good as a play for them. Why do you think the women are so enthusiastic?

MORELL: *shocked.* Candida!

CANDIDA: Oh, I know. You silly boy: you think it's your Socialism and your religion; but if it was that, they'd do what you tell them instead of only coming to look at you. They all have Prossy's complaint.

MORELL: Prossy's complaint! What do you mean, Candida?

CANDIDA: Yes, Prossy, and all the other secretaries you ever had. Why does Prossy condescend to wash up the things, and to peel potatoes and abase herself in all manner of ways for six shillings a week less than she used to get in a city office? She's in love with you, James: that's the reason. They're all in love with you. And you are in love with preaching because you do it so beautifully. And you think it's all enthusiasm for the kingdom of Heaven on earth; and so do they. You dear silly!

MORELL: Candida: what dreadful, what soul-destroying cynicism! Are you jesting? Or—can it be?—are you jealous?

CANDIDA: *with curious thoughtfulness.* Yes, I feel a little jealous sometimes.

MORELL: *incredulously.* What! Of Prossy?

CANDIDA: *laughing.* No, no, no, no. Not jealous of anybody. Jealous for somebody else, who is not loved as he ought to be.

MORELL: Me!

CANDIDA: You! Why, you're spoiled with love and worship: you get far more than is good for you. No: I mean Eugene.

MORELL: *startled.* Eugene!

CANDIDA: It seems unfair that all the love should go to you, and none to him, although he needs it so much more than you do. *A convulsive movement shakes him in spite of himself.* What's the matter? Am I worrying you?

MORELL: *hastily.* Not at all. *Looking at her with troubled intensity.* You know that I have perfect confidence in you, Candida.

CANDIDA: You vain thing! Are you so sure of your irresistible attractions?

MORELL: Candida: you are shocking me. I never thought of my attractions. I thought of your goodness—your purity. That is what I confide in.

CANDIDA: What a nasty, uncomfortable thing to say to me! Oh, you ARE a clergyman, James—a thorough clergyman.

MORELL: *turning away from her, heart-stricken.* So Eugene says.

CANDIDA: *with lively interest, leaning over to him with her arms on his knee.* Eugene's always right. He's a wonderful boy: I have grown fonder and fonder of him all the time I was away. Do you know, James, that though he has not the least suspicion of it himself, he is ready to fall madly in love with me?

MORELL: *grimly.* Oh, he has no suspicion of it himself, hasn't he?

CANDIDA: Not a bit. *She takes her arms from his knee, and turns thoughtfully, sinking into a more restful attitude with her hands in her lap.* Some day he will know when he is grown up and

experienced, like you. And he will know that I must have known. I wonder what he will think of me then.

MORELL: No evil, Candida. I hope and trust, no evil.

CANDIDA: *dubiously.* That will depend.

MORELL: *bewildered.* Depend!

CANDIDA: *looking at him.* Yes: it will depend on what happens to him. *He look vacantly at her.* Don't you see? It will depend on how he comes to learn what love really is. I mean on the sort of woman who will teach it to him.

MORELL: *quite at a loss.* Yes. No. I don't know what you mean.

CANDIDA: *explaining.* If he learns it from a good woman, then it will be all right: he will forgive me.

MORELL: Forgive!

CANDIDA: But suppose he learns it from a bad woman, as so many men do, especially poetic men, who imagine all women are angels! Suppose he only discovers the value of love when he has thrown it away and degraded himself in his ignorance. Will he forgive me then, do you think?

MORELL: Forgive you for what?

CANDIDA: *realizing how stupid he is, and a little disappointed, though quite tenderly so.* Don't you understand? *He shakes his head. She turns to him again, so as to explain with the fondest intimacy.* I mean, will he forgive me for not teaching him myself? For abandoning him to the bad women for the sake of my goodness—my purity, as you call it? Ah, James, how little you understand me, to talk of your confidence in my goodness and purity! I would give them both to poor Eugene as willingly as I would give my shawl to a beggar dying of cold, if there were nothing else to restrain me. Put your trust in my love for you, James, for if that went, I should care very little for your sermons—mere phrases that you cheat yourself and others with every day. *She is about to rise.*

MORELL: HIS words!

CANDIDA: *checking herself quickly in the act of getting up, so that she is on her knees, but upright.* Whose words?

MORELL: Eugene's.

CANDIDA: *delighted.* He is always right. He understands you; he understands me; he understands Prossy; and you, James—you understand nothing. *She laughs, and kisses him to console him. He recoils as if stung, and springs up.*

MORELL: How can you bear to do that when—oh, Candida *with anguish in his voice* I had rather you had plunged a grappling iron into my heart than given me that kiss.

CANDIDA: *rising, alarmed.* My dear: what's the matter?

MORELL: *frantically waving her off.* Don't touch me.

CANDIDA: *amazed.* James!

They are interrupted by the entrance of Marchbanks, with Burgess, who stops near the door, staring, whilst Eugene hurries forward between them.

MARCHBANKS: Is anything the matter?

MORELL: *deadly white, putting an iron constraint on himself.* Nothing but this: that either you were right this morning, or Candida is mad.

BURGESS: *in loudest protest.* Wot! Candy mad too! Oh, come, come, come! *(He crosses the room to the fireplace, protesting as he goes, and knocks the ashes out of his pipe on the bars. Morell sits down desperately, leaning forward to hide his face, and interlacing his fingers rigidly to keep them steady.)*

CANDIDA: *to Morell, relieved and laughing.* Oh, you're only shocked! Is that all? How conventional all you unconventional people are!

BURGESS: Come: be'ave yourself, Candy. What'll Mr. Morchbanks think of you?

CANDIDA: This comes of James teaching me to think for myself, and never to hold back out of fear of what other people may think of me. It works beautifully as long as I think the same things as he does. But now, because I have just thought something different!—look at him—just look!

She points to Morell, greatly amused. Eugene looks, and instantly presses his band on his heart, as if some deadly pain had shot through it, and sits down on the sofa like a man witnessing a tragedy.

BURGESS: *on the hearth-rug.* Well, James, you certainly ain't as himpressive lookin' as usu'l.

MORELL: *with a laugh which is half a sob.* I suppose not. I beg all your pardons: I was not conscious of making a fuss. *Pulling himself together.* Well, well, well, well, well! *He goes back to his place at the table, setting to work at his papers again with resolute cheerfulness.*

CANDIDA: *going to the sofa and sitting beside Marchbanks, still in a bantering humor.* Well, Eugene, why are you so sad? Did the onions make you cry?

Morell cannot prevent himself from watching them.

MARCHBANKS: *aside to her.* It is your cruelty. I hate cruelty. It is a horrible thing to see one person make another suffer.

CANDIDA: *petting him ironically.* Poor boy, have I been cruel? Did I make it slice nasty little red onions?

MARCHBANKS: *earnestly.* Oh, stop, stop: I don't mean myself. You have made him suffer frightfully. I feel his pain in my own heart. I know that it is not your fault—it is something that must happen; but don't make light of it. I shudder when you torture him and laugh.

CANDIDA: *incredulously.* I torture James! Nonsense, Eugene: how you exaggerate! Silly! *She looks round at Morell, who hastily resumes his writing. She goes to him and stands behind his chair, bending over him.* Don't work any more, dear. Come and talk to us.

MORELL: *affectionately but bitterly.* Ah no: I can't talk. I can only preach.

CANDIDA: *caressing him.* Well, come and preach.

BURGESS: *strongly remonstrating.* Aw, no, Candy. 'Ang it all! *Lexy Mill comes in, looking anxious and important.*

LEXY: *hastening to shake hands with Candida.* How do you do, Mrs. Morell? So glad to see you back again.

CANDIDA: Thank you, Lexy. You know Eugene, don't you?

LEXY: Oh, yes. How do you do, Marchbanks?

MARCHBANKS: Quite well, thanks.

LEXY: *to Morell.* I've just come from the Guild of St. Matthew. They are in the greatest consternation about your telegram. There's nothing wrong, is there?

CANDIDA: What did you telegraph about, James?

LEXY: *to Candida.* He was to have spoken for them tonight. They've taken the large hall in Mare Street

and spent a lot of money on posters. Morell's telegram was to say he couldn't come. It came on them like a thunderbolt.

CANDIDA: *surprized, and beginning to suspect something wrong.* Given up an engagement to speak!

BURGESS: First time in his life, I'll bet. Ain' it, Candy?

LEXY: *to Morell.* They decided to send an urgent telegram to you asking whether you could not change your mind. Have you received it?

MORELL: *with restrained impatience.* Yes, yes: I got it.

LEXY: It was reply paid.

MORELL: Yes, I know. I answered it. I can't go.

CANDIDA: But why, James?

MORELL: *almost fiercely.* Because I don't choose. These people forget that I am a man: they think I am a talking machine to be turned on for their pleasure every evening of my life. May I not have ONE night at home, with my wife, and my friends?

They are all amazed at this outburst, except Eugene. His expression remains unchanged.

CANDIDA: Oh, James, you know you'll have an attack of bad conscience to-morrow; and I shall have to suffer for that.

LEXY: *intimidated, but urgent.* I know, of course, that they make the most unreasonable demands on you. But they have been telegraphing all over the place for another speaker: and they can get nobody but the President of the Agnostic League.

MORELL: *promptly.* Well, an excellent man. What better do they want?

LEXY: But he always insists so powerfully on the divorce of Socialism from Christianity. He will undo all the good we have been doing. Of course you know best; but—[He hesitates.]

CANDIDA: *coaxingly.* Oh, DO go, James. We'll all go.

BURGESS: *grumbling.* Look 'ere, Candy! I say! Let's stay at home by the fire, comfortable. He won't need to be more'n a couple-o'-hour away.

CANDIDA: You'll be just as comfortable at the meeting. We'll all sit on the platform and be great people.

EUGENE: *terrified.* Oh, please don't let us go on the platform. No—everyone will stare at us—I couldn't. I'll sit at the back of the room.

CANDIDA: Don't be afraid. They'll be too busy looking at James to notice you.

MORELL: *turning his head and looking meaningly at her over his shoulder.* Prossy's complaint, Candida! Eh?

CANDIDA: *gaily.* Yes.

BURGESS: *mystified.* Prossy's complaint. Wot are you talking about, James?

MORELL: *not heeding him, rises; goes to the door; and holds it open, shouting in a commanding voice.* Miss Garnett.

PROSERPINE: *in the distance.* Yes, Mr. Morell. Coming. *They all wait, except Burgess, who goes stealthily to Lexy and draws him aside.*

BURGESS: Listen here, Mr. Mill. Wot's Prossy's complaint? Wot's wrong with 'er?

LEXY: *confidentially.* Well, I don't exactly know; but she spoke very strangely to me this morning. I'm afraid she's a little out of her mind sometimes.

BURGESS: *overwhelmed.* Why, it must be catchin'! Four in the same 'ouse! *He goes back to the hearth, quite lost before the instability of the human intellect in a clergyman's house.*

PROSERPINE: *appearing on the threshold.* What is it, Mr. Morell?

MORELL: Telegraph to the Guild of St. Matthew that I am coming.

PROSERPINE: *surprised.* Don't they expect you?

MORELL: *peremptorily.* Do as I tell you.

Proserpine frightened, sits down at her typewriter, and obeys. Morell goes across to Burgess, Candida watching his movements all the time with growing wonder and misgiving.

MORELL: Burgess: you don't want to come?

BURGESS: *in deprecation.* Oh, don't put it like that, James. It's only that it ain't Sunday, you know.

MORELL: I'm sorry. I thought you might like to be introduced to the chairman. He's on the Works Committee of the County Council and has some influence in the matter of contracts. *Burgess wakes up at once. Morell, expecting as much, waits a moment, and says* Will you come?

BURGESS: *with enthusiasm.* Course I'll come, James. Ain' it always a pleasure to 'ear you.

MORELL: *turning from him.* I shall want you to take some notes at the meeting, Miss Garnett, if you have no other engagement. *She nods, afraid to speak.* You are coming, Lexy, I suppose.

LEXY: Certainly.

CANDIDA: We are all coming, James.

MORELL: No: you are not coming; and Eugene is not coming. You will stay here and entertain him—to celebrate your return home. *Eugene rises, breathless.*

CANDIDA: But James—

MORELL: *authoritatively.* I insist. You do not want to come; and he does not want to come. *Candida is about to protest.* Oh, don't concern yourselves: I shall have plenty of people without you: your chairs will be wanted by unconverted people who have never heard me before.

CANDIDA: *troubled.* Eugene: wouldn't you like to come?

MORELL: I should be afraid to let myself go before Eugene: he is so critical of sermons. *Looking at him.* He knows I am afraid of him: he told me as much this morning. Well, I shall show him how much afraid I am by leaving him here in your custody, Candida.

MARCHBANKS: *to himself, with vivid feeling.* That's brave. That's beautiful. *He sits down again listening with parted lips.*

CANDIDA: *with anxious misgiving.* But—but—is anything the matter, James? *Greatly troubled.* I can't understand—

MORELL: Ah, I thought it was I who couldn't understand, dear. *He takes her tenderly in his arms and kisses her on the forehead; then looks round quietly at Marchbanks.*

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

Fonte: Wikisource *(en),* CC BY-SA 4.0: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Candida

Scaricato da Progetto Teatro: https://www.progettoteatro.it/copioni/copione.php?id=672