Mrs. Warren's Profession - Act II

di George Bernard Shaw (1898)

ACT II

Inside the cottage after nightfall. Looking eastward from within instead of westward from without, the latticed window, with its curtains drawn, is now seen in the middle of the front wall of the cottage, with the porch door to the left of it. In the left-hand side wall is the door leading to the kitchen. Farther back against the same wall is a dresser with a candle and matches on it, and Frank's rifle standing beside them, with the barrel resting in the plate-rack. In the centre a table stands with a lighted lamp on it. Vivie's books and writing materials are on a table to the right of the window, against the wall. The fireplace is on the right, with a settle: there is no fire. Two of the chairs are set right and left of the table.

The cottage door opens, shewing a fine starlit night without; and Mrs Warren, her shoulders wrapped in a shawl borrowed from Vivie, enters, followed by Frank, who throws his cap on the window seat. She has had enough of walking, and gives a gasp of relief as she unpins her hat; takes it off; sticks the pin through the crown; and puts it on the table.

MRS. WARREN: O Lord! I don't know which is the worst of the country, the walking or the sitting at home with nothing to do. I could do with a whisky and soda now very well, if only they had such a things in this place.

FRANK: Perhaps Vivie's got some.

MRS. WARREN: Nonsense! What would a young girl like her be doing with such things! Never mind: it don't matter. I wonder how she passes her time here! I'd a good deal rather be in Vienna.

FRANK: Let me take you there. *He helps her to take off her shawl, gallantly giving her shoulders a very perceptible squeeze as he does so*

MRS. WARREN: Ah! would you? I'm beginning to think youre a chip of the old block.

FRANK: Like the gov'nor, eh? *He hangs the shawl on the nearest chair, and sits down*

MRS. WARREN: Never you mind. What do you know about such things?

MRS. WARREN: Youre only a boy. *She goes to the hearth to be farther from temptation*

FRANK: Do come to Vienna with me? It'd be ever such larks.

MRS. WARREN: No, thank you. Vienna is no place for you—at least not until youre a little older. *She nods at him to mphasize this piece of advice. He makes a mock-piteous face, belied by his laughing eyes. She looks at him; then comes back to him.ow, look here, little boy taking his face in her hands and turning it up to her: I know you through and through by your likeness to your father, better than you know yourself. Don't you go taking any silly ideas into your head about me. Do you hear?*

FRANK: *gallantly wooing her with his voice* Can't help it, my dear Mrs Warren: it runs in the family.

She pretends to box his ears; then looks at the pretty laughing upturned face of a moment, tempted. At last she kisses him, and immediately turns away, out of patience with herself.

MRS. WARREN: There! I shouldn't have done that. I am wicked. Never you mind, my dear: it's only a motherly kiss. Go and make love to Vivie.

FRANK: So I have.

MRS. WARREN: *turning on him with a sharp note of alarm in her voice* What!

FRANK: Vivie and I are ever such chums.

MRS. WARREN: What do you mean? Now see here: I won't have any young scamp tampering with my little girl. Do you hear? I won't have it.

FRANK: *quite unabashed* My dear Mrs Warren: don't you be alarmed. My intentions are honorable: ever so honorable; and your little girl is jolly well able to take care of herself. She don't need looking after half so much as her mother. She ain't so handsome, you know.

MRS. WARREN: *taken aback by his assurance* Well, you have got a nice healthy two inches of cheek all over you. I don't know where you got it. Not from your father, anyhow.

CROFTS: *in the garden* The gipsies, I suppose?

REV. S.: *replying* The broomsquires are far worse.

MRS. WARREN: *to Frank* S-sh! Remember! you've had your warning.

Crofts and the Reverend Samuel Gardner come in from the garden, the clergyman continuing his conversation as he enters.

REV. S.: The perjury at the Winchester assizes is deplorable.

MRS. WARREN: Well? what became of you two? And wheres Praddy and Vivie?

CROFTS: *putting his hat on the settle and his stick in the chimney corner* They went up the hill. We went to the village. I wanted a drink. *He sits down on the settle, putting his legs up along the seat*

MRS. WARREN: Well, she oughtn't to go off like that without telling me. *To Frank* Get your father a chair, Frank: where are your manners? *Frank springs up and gracefully offers his father his chair; then takes another from the wall and sits down at the table, in the middle, with his father on his right and Mrs Warren on his left* George: where are you going to stay to-night? You can't stay here. And whats Praddy going to do?

CROFTS: Gardner'll put me up.

MRS. WARREN: Oh, no doubt you've taken care of yourself! But what about Praddy?

CROFTS: Don't know. I suppose he can sleep at the inn.

MRS. WARREN: Havn't you room for him, Sam?

REV. S.: Well—er—you see, as rector here, I am not free to do as I like. Er—what is Mr Praed's social position?

MRS. WARREN: Oh, he's all right: he's an architect. What an old stick-in-the-mud you are, Sam!

FRANK: Yes, it's all right, gov'nor. He built that place down in Wales for the Duke. Caernarvon Castle they call it. You must have heard of it. *He winks with lightning smartness at Mrs Warren, and regards his father blandly*

REV. S.: Oh, in that case, of course we shall only be too happy. I suppose he knows the Duke personally.

FRANK: Oh, ever so intimately! We can stick him in Georgina's old room.

MRS. WARREN: Well, thats settled. Now if those two would only come in and let us have supper. Theyve no right to stay out after dark like this.

CROFTS: *aggressively* What harm are they doing you?

MRS. WARREN: Well, harm or not, I don't like it.

FRANK: Better not wait for them, Mrs Warren. Praed will stay out as long as possible. He has never known before what it is to stray over the heath on a summer night with my Vivie.

CROFTS: *sitting up in some consternation* I say, you know! Come!

REV. S.: *rising, startled out of his professional manner into real force and sincerity* Frank, once and for all, it's out of the question. Mrs Warren will tell you that it's not to be thought of.

CROFTS: Of course not.

FRANK: *with enchanting placidity* Is that so, Mrs Warren?

MRS. WARREN: *reflectively* Well, Sam, I don't know. If the girl wants to get married, no good can come of keeping her unmarried.

REV. S.: *astounded* But married to him!—your daughter to my son! Only think: it's impossible.

CROFTS: Of course it's impossible. Don't be a fool, Kitty.

MRS. WARREN: *nettled* Why not? Isn't my daughter good enough for your son?

REV. S.: But surely, my dear Mrs Warren, you know the reasons—

MRS. WARREN: *defiantly* I know no reasons. If you know any, you can tell them to the lad, or to the girl, or to your congregation, if you like.

REV. S.: *collapsing helplessly into his chair* You know very well that I couldn't tell anyone the reasons. But my boy will believe me when I tell him there a r e reasons.

FRANK: Quite right, Dad: he will. But has your boy's conduct ever been influenced by your reasons?

CROFTS: You can't marry her; and thats all about it. *He gets up and stands on the hearth, with his back to the fireplace, frowning determinedly*

MRS. WARREN: *turning on him sharply* What have you got to do with it, pray?

FRANK: *with his prettiest lyrical cadence* Precisely what I was going to ask, myself, in my own graceful fashion.

CROFTS: *to Mrs Warren* I suppose you don't want to marry the girl to a man younger than herself and without either a profession or twopence to keep her on. Ask Sam, if you don't believe me. *To the parson* How much more money are you going to give him?

REV. S.: Not another penny. He has had his patrimony; and he spent the last of it in July. *Mrs Warren's face falls*

CROFTS: *watching her* There! I told you. *He resumes his place on the settle and puts his legs on the seat again, as if the matter were finally disposed of*

FRANK: *plaintively* This is ever so mercenary. Do you suppose Miss Warren's going to marry for money? If we love one another—

MRS. WARREN: Thank you. Your love's a pretty cheap commodity, my lad. If you have no means of keeping a wife, that settles it; you can't have Vivie.

FRANK: *much amused* What do you say, gov'nor, eh?

REV. S.: I agree with Mrs Warren.

FRANK: And good old Crofts has already expressed his opinion.

CROFTS: *turning angrily on his elbow* Look here: I want none of your cheek.

FRANK: *pointedly* I'm e v e r so sorry to surprise you, Crofts; but you allowed yourself the liberty of speaking to me like a father a moment ago. One father is enough, thank you.

CROFTS: *contemptuously* Yah! *He turns away again*

FRANK: *rising* Mrs Warren: I cannot give my Vivie up, even for your sake.

MRS. WARREN: *muttering* Young scamp!

FRANK: *continuing* And as you no doubt intend to hold out other prospects to her, I shall lose no time in placing my case before her. *They stare at him; and he begins to declaim gracefully* He either fears his fate too much, Or his deserts are small, That dares not put it to the touch, To gain or lose it all.

The cottage doors open whilst he is reciting; and Vivie and Praed come in. He breaks off. Praed puts his hat on the dresser. There is an immediate improvement in the company's behavior. Crofts takes down his legs from the settle and pulls himself together as Praed joins him at the fireplace. Mrs Warren loses her ease of manner and takes refuge in querulousness.

MRS. WARREN: Wherever have you been, Vivie?

VIVIE: *taking off her hat and throwing it carelessly on the table* On the hill.

MRS. WARREN: Well, you shouldn't go off like that without letting me know. How could I tell what had become of you? And night coming on too!

VIVIE: *going to the door of the kitchen and opening it, ignoring her mother* Now, about supper? *All rise except Mrs Warren* We shall be rather crowded in here, I'm afraid.

MRS. WARREN: Did you hear what I said, Vivie?

VIVIE: *quietly* Yes, mother. *Reverting to the supper difficulty* How many are we? *Counting* One, two, three, four, five, six. Well, two will have to wait until the rest are done: Mrs Alison has only plates and knives for four.

PRAED: Oh, it doesn't matter about me. I—

VIVIE: You have had a long walk and are hungry, Mr Praed: you shall have your supper at once. I can wait myself. I want one person to wait with me. Frank: are you hungry?

FRANK: Not the least in the world. Completely off my peck, in fact.

MRS. WARREN: *to Crofts* Neither are you, George. You can wait.

CROFTS: Oh, hang it, I've eaten nothing since tea-time. Can't Sam do it?

FRANK: Would you starve my poor father?

REV. S.: *testily* Allow me to speak for myself, sir. I am perfectly willing to wait.

VIVIE: *decisively* There's no need. Only two are wanted. *She opens the door of the kitchen* Will you take my mother in, Mr Gardner. *The parson takes Mrs Warren; and they pass into the kitchen. Praed and Crofts follow. All except Praed clearly isapprove of the arrangement, but do not know how to resist it. Vivie stands at the door looking in at them* Can you squeeze past to that corner, Mr Praed: it's rather a tight fit. Take care of your coat against the white-wash: that right. Now, are you all comfortable?

PRAED: *within* Quite, thank you.

MRS. WARREN: *within* Leave the door open, dearie. *Vivie frowns; but Frank checks her with a gesture, and steals to the cottage door, which he softly sets wide open* Oh Lor, what a draught! Youd better shut it, dear.

Vivie shuts it with a slam, and then, noting with disgust that her mother's hat and shawl are lying about, takes them tidily to the window seat, whilst Frank noiselessly shuts the cottage door.

FRANK: *exulting* Aha! Got rid of em. Well, Vivvums: what do you think of my governor?

VIVIE: *preoccupied and serious* I've hardly spoken to him. He doesn't strike me as a particularly able

person.

FRANK: Well, you know, the old man is not altogether such a fool as he looks. You see, he was shoved into the Church, rather; and in trying to live up to it he makes a much bigger ass of himself than he really is. I don't dislike him as much as you might expect. He means well. How do you think youll get on with him?

VIVIE: *rather grimly* I don't think my future life will be much concerned with him, or with any of that old circle of my mother's, except perhaps Praed. *She sits down on the settle* What do you think of my mother?

FRANK: Really and truly?

VIVIE: Yes, really and truly.

FRANK: Well, she's ever so jolly. But she's rather a caution, isn't she? And Crofts! Oh, my eye, Crofts! *He sits beside her*

VIVIE: What a lot, Frank!

FRANK: What a crew!

VIVIE: *with intense contempt for them* If I thought that I was like that—that I was going to be a waster, shifting along from one meal to another with no purpose, and no character, and no grit in me, I'd open an artery and bleed to death without one moment's hesitation.

FRANK: Oh no, you wouldn't. Why should they take any grind when they can afford not to? I wish I had their luck. No: what I object to is their form. It isn't the thing: it's slovenly, ever so slovenly.

VIVIE: Do you think your form will be any better when youre as old as Crofts, if you don't work?

FRANK: Of course I do. Ever so much better. Vivvums mustn't lecture: her little boy's incorrigible. *He attempts to take her face caressingly in his hands*

VIVIE: *striking his hands down sharply* Off with you: Vivvums is not in a humor for petting her little boy this evening. *She rises and comes forward to the other side of the room*

FRANK: *following her* How unkind!

VIVIE: *stamping at him* Be serious. I'm serious.

FRANK: Good. Let us talk learnedly, Miss Warren: do you know that all the most advanced thinkers are agreed that half the diseases of modern civilization are due to starvation of the affections of the young. Now, I—

VIVIE: *cutting him short* You are very tiresome. *She opens the inner door* Have you room for Frank there? He's complaining of starvation.

MRS. WARREN: *within* Of course there is *clatter of knives and glasses as she moves the things on the table* Here! theres room now beside me. Come along, Mr Frank.

FRANK: Her little boy will be ever so even with his Vivvums for this. *He passes into the kitchen*

MRS. WARREN: *within* Here, Vivie: come on you too, child. You must be famished. *She enters, followed by Crofts, who holds the door open with marked deference. She goes out without looking at him; and he shuts the door after her* Why George, you can't be done: you've eaten nothing. Is there anything wrong with you?

CROFTS: Oh, all I wanted was a drink. *He thrusts his hands in his pockets, and begins prowling about the room, restless and sulky*

MRS. WARREN: Well, I like enough to eat. But a little of that cold beef and cheese and lettuce goes a

long way. *With a sigh of only half repletion she sits down lazily on the settle*

CROFTS: What do you go encouraging that young pup for?

MRS. WARREN: *on the alert at once* Now see here, George: what are you up to about that girl? I've been watching your way of looking at her. Remember: I know you and what your looks mean.

CROFTS: Theres no harm in looking at her, is there?

MRS. WARREN: I'd put you out and pack you back to London pretty soon if I saw any of your nonsense. My girl's little finger is more to me than your whole body and soul. *Crofts receives this with a sneering grin. Mrs Warren, flushing a little at her failure to impose on him in the character of a theatrically devoted mother, adds in a lower key* Make your mind easy: the young pup has no more chance than you have.

CROFTS: Mayn't a man take an interest in a girl?

MRS. WARREN: Not a man like you.

CROFTS: How old is she?

MRS. WARREN: Never you mind how old she is.

CROFTS: Why do you make such a secret of it?

MRS. WARREN: Because I choose.

CROFTS: Well, I'm not fifty yet; and my property is as good as it ever was—

MRS. WARREN: *interrupting him* Yes; because youre as stingy as youre vicious.

CROFTS: *continuing* And a baronet isn't to be picked up every day. No other man in my position would put up with you for a mother-in-law. Why shouldn't she marry me?

MRS. WARREN: You!

CROFTS: We three could live together quite comfortably. I'd die before her and leave her a bouncing widow with plenty of money. Why not? It's been growing in my mind all the time I've been walking with that fool inside there.

MRS. WARREN: *revolted* Yes; it's the sort of thing that would grow in your mind.

He halts in his prowling; and the two look at one another, she steadfastly, with a sort of awe behind her contemptuous disgust: he stealthily, with a carnal gleam in his eye and a loose grin.

CROFTS: *suddenly becoming anxious and urgent as he sees no sign of sympathy in her* Look here, Kitty: youre a sensible woman: you needn't put on any moral airs. I'll ask no more questions; and you need answer none. I'll settle the whole property on her; and if you want a checque for yourself on the wedding day, you can name any figure you like—in reason.

MRS. WARREN: So it's come to that with you, George, like all the other worn-out old creatures!

CROFTS: *savagely* Damn you!

Before she can retort the door of the kitchen is opened; and the voices of the others are heard returning. Crofts, unable to recover his presence of mind, hurries out of the cottage. The clergyman appears at the kitchen door.

REV. S.: *looking round* Where is Sir George?

MRS. WARREN: Gone out to have a pipe. *The clergyman takes his hat from the table, and joins Mrs Warren at the fireside. Meanwhile, Vivie comes in, followed by Frank, who collapses into the nearest chair with an air of extreme exhaustion. Mrs Warren looks round at Vivie and says, with her affectation of maternal patronage even more forced than usual* Well, dearie: have you had a

good supper?

VIVIE: You know what Mrs Alison's suppers are. *She turns to Frank and pets him* Poor Frank! was all the beef gone? did it get nothing but bread and cheese and ginger beer? *Seriously, as if she had done quite enough trifling for one evening* Her butter is really awful. I must get some down from the stores.

FRANK: Do, in Heaven's name!

Vivie goes to the writing-table and makes a memorandum to order the butter. Praed comes in from the kitchen, putting up his handkerchief, which he has been using as a napkin.

REV. S.: Frank, my boy: it is time for us to be thinking of home. Your mother does not know yet that we have visitors.

PRAED: I'm afraid we're giving trouble.

FRANK: *rising* Not the least in the world: my mother will be delighted to see you. She's a genuinely intellectual artistic woman; and she sees nobody here from one year's end to another except the gov'nor; so you can imagine how jolly dull it pans out for her. *To his father* Youre not intellectual or artistic: are you pater? So take Praed home at once; and I'll stay here and entertain Mrs Warren. Youll pick up Crofts in the garden. He'll be excellent company for the bull-pup.

PRAED: *taking his hat from the dresser, and coming close to Frank* Come with us, Frank. Mrs Warren has not seen Miss Vivie for a long time; and we have prevented them from having a moment together yet.

FRANK: *quite softened, and looking at Praed with romantic admiration* Of course. I forgot. Ever so thanks for reminding me. Perfect gentleman, Praddy. Always were. My ideal through life. *He rises to go, but pauses a moment between the two older men, and puts his hand on Praed's shoulder* Ah, if you had only been my father instead of this unworthy old man! *He puts his other hand on his father's shoulder*

REV. S.: *blustering* Silence, sir, silence: you are profane.

MRS. WARREN: *laughing heartily* You should keep him in better order, Sam. Good-night. Here: take George his hat and stick with my compliments.

REV. S.: *taking them* Good-night. *They shake hands. As he passes Vivie he shakes hands with her also and bids her good-night. Then, in booming command, to Frank* Come along, sir, at once. *He goes out*

MRS. WARREN: Byebye, Praddy.

PRAED: Byebye, Kitty.

They shake hands affectionately and go out together, she accompanying him to the garden gate.

FRANK: *to Vivie* Kissums?

VIVIE: *fiercely* No. I hate you. *She takes a couple of books and some paper from the writing-table, and sits down with them at the middle table, at the end next the fireplace*

FRANK: *grimacing* Sorry. *He goes for his cap and rifle. Mrs Warren returns. He takes her hand* Good-night, dear Mrs Warren. *He kisses her hand. She snatches it away, her lips tightening, and looks more than half disposed to box his ears. He laughs mischievously and runs off, clapping-to the door behind him*

MRS. WARREN: *resigning herself to an evening of boredom now that the men are gone* Did you ever in your life hear anyone rattle on so? Isn't he a tease? *She sits at the table* Now that I think of it, dearie, don't you go encouraging him. I'm sure he's a regular good-for-nothing.

VIVIE: *rising to fetch more books* I'm afraid so. Poor Frank! I shall have to get rid of him; but I shall feel sorry for him, though he's not worth it. That man Crofts does not seem to me to be good for much either: is he? *She throws the books on the table rather roughly*

MRS. WARREN: *galled by Vivie's indifference* What do you know of men, child, to talk that way of them? Youll have to make up your mind to see a good deal of Sir George Crofts, as he's a friend of mine.

VIVIE: *quite unmoved* Why? *She sits down and opens a book* Do you expect that we shall be much together? You and I, I mean?

MRS. WARREN: *staring at her* Of course: until youre married. Youre not going back to college again.

VIVIE: Do you think my way of life would suit you? I doubt it.

MRS. WARREN: Your way of life! What do you mean?

VIVIE: *cutting a page of her book with the paper knife on her chatelaine* Has it really never occurred to you, mother, that I have a way of life like other people?

MRS. WARREN: What nonsense is this youre trying to talk? Do you want to shew your independence, now that youre a great little person at school? Don't be a fool, child.

VIVIE: *indulgently* Thats all you have to say on the subject, is it, mother?

MRS. WARREN: *puzzled, then angry* Don't you keep on asking me questions like that. *Violently* Hold your tongue. *Vivie works on, losing no time, and saying nothing* You and your way of life, indeed! What next? *She looks at Vivie again. No reply*

MRS. WARREN: Your way of life will be what I please, so it will. *Another pause* Ive been noticing these airs in you ever since you got that tripos or whatever you call it. If you think I'm going to put up with them, youre mistaken; and the sooner you find it out, the better. *Muttering* All I have to say on the subject, indeed! *Again raising her voice angrily* Do you know who youre speaking to, Miss?

VIVIE: *looking across at her without raising her head from her book* No. Who are you? What are you?

MRS. WARREN: *rising breathless* You young imp!

VIVIE: Everybody knows my reputation, my social standing, and the profession I intend to pursue. I know nothing about you. What is that way of life which you invite me to share with you and Sir George Crofts, pray?

MRS. WARREN: Take care. I shall do something I'll be sorry for after, and you too.

VIVIE: *putting aside her books with cool decision* Well, let us drop the subject until you are better able to face it. *Looking critically at her mother* You want some good walks and a little lawn tennis to set you up. You are shockingly out of condition: you were not able to manage twenty yards uphill today without stopping to pant; and your wrists are mere rolls of fat. Look at mine. *She holds out her wrists*

MRS. WARREN: *after looking at her helplessly, begins to whimper* Vivie—

VIVIE: *springing up sharply* Now pray don't begin to cry. Anything but that. I really cannot stand whimpering. I will go out of the room if you do.

MRS. WARREN: *piteously* Oh, my darling, how can you be so hard on me? Have I no rights over you as your mother?

VIVIE: Are you my mother?

MRS. WARREN: Am I your mother? Oh, Vivie!

VIVIE: Then where are our relatives? my father? our family friends? You claim the rights of a mother: the right to call me fool and child; to speak to me as no woman in authority over me at college dare speak to me; to dictate my way of life; and to force on me the acquaintance of a brute whom anyone can see to be the most vicious sort of London man about town. Before I give myself the trouble to resist such claims, I may as well find out whether they have any real existence.

MRS. WARREN: *distracted, throwing herself on her knees* Oh no, no. Stop, stop. I am your mother: I swear it. Oh, you can't mean to turn on me—myown child! it's not natural. You believe me, don't you? Say you believe me.

VIVIE: Who was my father?

MRS. WARREN: You don't know what youre asking. I can't tell you.

VIVIE: *determinedly* Oh yes you can, if you like. I have a right to know; and you know very well that I have that right. You can refuse to tell me if you please; but if you do, you will see the last of me tomorrow morning.

MRS. WARREN: Oh, it's too horrible to hear you talk like that. You wouldn't—youcouldn't leave me.

VIVIE: *ruthlessly* Yes, without a moment's hesitation, if you trifle with me about this. *Shivering with disgust* How can I feel sure that I may not have the contaminated blood of that brutal waster in my veins?

MRS. WARREN: No, no. On my oath it's not he, nor any of the rest that you have ever met. I'm certain of that, at least.

Vivie's eyes fasten sternly on her mother as the significance of this flashes on her.

VIVIE: *slowly* You are certain of that, at least. Ah! You mean that that is all you are certain of. *Thoughtfully* I see. *Mrs Warren buries her face in her hands* Don't do that, mother: you know you don't feel it a bit. *Mrs Warren takes down her hands and looks up deplorably at Vivie, who takes out her watch and says* Well, that is enough for tonight. At what hour would you like breakfast? Is half-past eight too early for you?

MRS. WARREN: *wildly* My God, what sort of woman are you?

VIVIE: *coolly* The sort the world is mostly made of, I should hope. Otherwise I don't understand how it gets its business done.

VIVIE: Come *taking her mother by the wrist and pulling her up pretty resolutely:* pull yourself together. Thats right.

MRS. WARREN: *querulously* Youre very rough with me, Vivie.

VIVIE: Nonsense. What about bed? It's past ten.

MRS. WARREN: *passionately* Whats the use of my going to bed? Do you think I could sleep?

VIVIE: Why not? I shall.

MRS. WARREN: You! you've no heart. *She suddenly breaks out vehemently in her natural tongue—the dialect of a woman of the people—withall her affectations of maternal authority and conventional manners gone, and an overwhelming inspiration of true conviction and scorn in her* Oh, I wont bear it: I won't put up with the injustice of it. What right have you to set yourself up above me like this? You boast of what you are to me—tome, who gave you a chance of being what you are. What chance had I? Shame on you for a bad daughter and a stuck-up prude!

VIVIE: *sitting down with a shrug, no longer confident; for her replies, which have sounded sensible and strong to her so far, now begin to ring rather woodenly and even priggishly against the new tone of her mother* Don't think for a moment I set myself above you in any way. You attacked me with

the conventional authority of a mother: I defended myself with the conventional superiority of a respectable woman. Frankly, I am not going to stand any of your nonsense; and when you drop it I shall not expect you to stand any of mine. I shall always respect your right to your own opinions and your own way of life.

MRS. WARREN: My own opinions and my own way of life! Listen to her talking! Do you think I was brought up like you? able to pick and choose my own way of life? Do you think I did what I did because I liked it, or thought it right, or wouldn't rather have gone to college and been a lady if I'd had the chance?

VIVIE: Everybody has some choice, mother. The poorest girl alive may not be able to choose between being Queen of England or Principal of Newnham; but she can choose between ragpicking and flowerselling, according to her taste. People are always blaming circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them.

MRS. WARREN: Oh, it's easy to talk, isn't it? Here! would you like to know what my circumstances were?

VIVIE: Yes: you had better tell me. Won't you sit down?

MRS. WARREN: Oh, I'll sit down: don't you be afraid. *She plants her chair farther forward with brazen energy, and sits down. Vivie is impressed in spite of herself* D'you know what your gran'mother was?

VIVIE: No.

MRS. WARREN: No, you don't. I do. She called herself a widow and had a fried-fish shop down by the Mint, and kept herself and four daughters out of it. Two of us were sisters: that was me and Liz; and we were both good-looking and well made. I suppose our father was a well-fed man: mother pretended he was a gentleman; but I don't know. The other two were only half sisters: undersized, ugly, starved looking, hard working, honest poor creatures: Liz and I would have half-murdered them if mother hadn't half-murdered us to keep our hands off them. They were the respectable ones. Well, what did they get by their respectability? I'll tell you. One of them worked in a whitelead factory twelve hours a day for nine shillings a week until she died of lead poisoning. She only expected to get her hands a little paralyzed; but she died. The other was always held up to us as a model because she married a Government laborer in the Deptford victualling yard, and kept his room and the three children neat and tidy on eighteen shillings a week—until he took to drink. That was worth being respectable for, wasn't it?

VIVIE: *now thoughtfully attentive* Did you and your sister think so?

MRS. WARREN: Liz didn't, I can tell you: she had more spirit. We both went to a church school—that was part of the ladylike airs we gave ourselves to be superior to the children that knew nothing and went nowhere—and we stayed there until Liz went out one night and never came back. I know the schoolmistress thought I'd soon follow her example; for the clergyman was always warning me that Lizzie'd end by jumping off Waterloo Bridge. Poor fool: that was all he knew about it! But I was more afraid of the whitelead factory than I was of the river; and so would you have been in my place. That clergyman got me a situation as a scullery maid in a temperance restaurant where they sent out for anything you liked. Then I was a waitress; and then I went to the bar at Waterloo station: fourteen hours a day serving drinks and washing glasses for four shillings a week and my board. That was considered a great promotion for me. Well, one cold, wretched night, when I was so tired I could hardly keep myself awake, who should come up for a half of Scotch but Lizzie, in a long fur cloak, elegant and comfortable, with a lot of sovereigns in her purse.

VIVIE: *grimly* My aunt Lizzie!

MRS. WARREN: Yes; and a very good aunt to have, too. She's living down at Winchester now, close to the cathedral, one of the most respectable ladies there. Chaperones girls at the country ball, if you please. No river for Liz, thank you! You remind me of Liz a little: she was a first-rate business woman—saved money from the beginning—never let herself look too like what she was—never lost her head or threw away a chance. When she saw I'd grown up good-looking she said to me across the bar "What are you doing there, you little fool? wearing out your health and your appearance for other people's profit!" Liz was saving money then to take a house for herself in Brussels; and she thought we two could save faster than one. So she lent me some money and gave me a start; and I saved steadily and first paid her back, and then went into business with her as a partner. Why shouldn't I have done it? The house in Brussels was real high class: a much better place for a woman to be in than the factory where Anne Jane got poisoned. None of the girls were ever treated as I was treated in the scullery of that temperance place, or at the Waterloo bar, or at home. Would you have had me stay in them and become a worn out old drudge before I was forty?

VIVIE: *intensely interested by this time* No; but why did you choose that business? Saving money and good management will succeed in any business.

MRS. WARREN: Yes, saving money. But where can a woman get the money to save in any other business? Could y o u save out of four shillings a week and keep yourself dressed as well? Not you. Of course, if youre a plain woman and can't earn anything more; or if you have a turn for music, or the stage, or newspaper-writing: thats different. But neither Liz nor I had any turn for such things at all: all we had was our appearance and our turn for pleasing men. Do you think we were such fools as to let other people trade in our good looks by employing us as shopgirls, or barmaids, or waitresses, when we could trade in them ourselves and get all the profits instead of starvation wages? Not likely.

VIVIE: You were certainly quite justified—from the business point of view.

MRS. WARREN: Yes; or any other point of view. What is any respectable girl brought up to do but to catch some rich man's fancy and get the benefit of his money by marrying him?—as if a marriage ceremony could make any difference in the right or wrong of the thing! Oh, the hypocrisy of the world makes me sick! Liz and I had to work and save and calculate just like other people; elseways we should be as poor as any good-for-nothing drunken waster of a woman that thinks her luck will last for ever. *With great energy* I despise such people: theyve no character; and if theres a thing I hate in a woman, it's want of character.

VIVIE: Come now, mother: frankly! Isn't it part of what you call character in a woman that she should greatly dislike such a way of making money?

MRS. WARREN: Why, of course. Everybody dislikes having to work and make money; but they have to do it all the same. I'm sure I've often pitied a poor girl, tired out and in low spirits, having to try to please some man that she doesn't care two straws for—some half-drunken fool that thinks he's making himself agreeable when he's teasing and worrying and disgusting a woman so that hardly any money could pay her for putting up with it. But she has to bear with disagreeables and take the rough with the smooth, just like a nurse in a hospital or anyone else. It's not work that any woman would do for pleasure, goodness knows; though to hear the pious people talk you would suppose it was a bed of roses.

VIVIE: Still, you consider it worth while. It pays.

MRS. WARREN: Of course it's worth while to a poor girl, if she can resist temptation and is good-looking and well conducted and sensible. It's far better than any other employment open to her.

MRS. WARREN: I always thought that it oughtn't to be. It can't be right, Vivie, that there shouldn't be better opportunities for women. I stick to that: it's wrong. But it's so, right or wrong; and a girl must make the best of it. But of course it's not worth while for a lady. If you took to it youd be a fool; but I should have been a fool if I'd taken to anything else.

VIVIE: *more and more deeply moved* Mother: suppose we were both as poor as you were in those wretched old days, are you quite sure that you wouldn't advise me to try the Waterloo bar, or marry a laborer, or even go into the factory?

MRS. WARREN: *indignantly* Of course not. What sort of mother do you take me for! How could you keep your self-respect in such starvation and slavery? And whats a woman worth? whats life worth? without self-respect! Why am I independent and able to give my daughter a first-rate education, when other women that had just as good opportunities are in the gutter? Because I always knew how to respect myself and control myself. Why is Liz looked up to in a cathedral town? The same reason. Where would we be now if we'd minded the clergyman's foolishness? Scrubbing floors for one and sixpence a day and nothing to look forward to but the workhouse infirmary. Don't you be led astray by people who don't know the world, my girl. The only way for a woman to provide for herself decently is for her to be good to some man that can afford to be good to her. If she's in his own station of life, let her make him marry her; but if she's far beneath him she can't expect it: why should she? it wouldn't be for her own happiness. Ask any lady in London society that has daughters; and she'll tell you the same, except that I tell you straight and she'll tell you crooked. Thats all the difference.

VIVIE: *fascinated, gazing at her* My dear mother: you are a wonderful woman: you are stronger than all England. And are you really and truly not one wee bit doubtful—or—or—ashamed?

MRS. WARREN: Well, of course, dearie, it's only good manners to be ashamed of it: it's expected from a woman. Women have to pretend to feel a great deal that they don't feel. Liz used to be angry with me for plumping out the truth about it. She used to say that when every woman could learn enough from what was going on in the world before her eyes, there was no need to talk about it to her. But then Liz was such a perfect lady! She had the true instinct of it; while I was always a bit of a vulgarian. I used to be so pleased when you sent me your photos to see that you were growing up like Liz: you've just her ladylike, determined way. But I can't stand saying one thing when everyone knows I mean another. Whats the use in such hypocrisy? If people arrange the world that way for women, theres no good pretending it's arranged the other way. No: I never was a bit ashamed really. I consider I had a right to be proud of how we managed everything so respectably, and never had a word against us, and how the girls were so well taken care of. Some of them did very well: one of them married an ambassador. But of course now I daren't talk about such things: whatever would they think of us! *She yawns* Oh dear! I do believe I'm getting sleepy after all. *She stretches herself lazily, thoroughly relieved by her explosion, and placidly ready for her night's rest*

VIVIE: I believe it is I who will not be able to sleep now. *She goes to the dresser and lights the candle. Then she extinguishes the lamp, darkening the room a good deal* Better let in some fresh air before locking up. *She opens the cottage door, and finds that it is broad moonlight* What a beautiful night! Look! *She draws the curtains of the window. The landscape is seen bathed in the radiance of the harvest moon rising over Blackdown*

MRS. WARREN: *with a perfunctory glance at the scene* Yes, dear; but take care you don't catch your death of cold from the night air.

VIVIE: *contemptuously* Nonsense.

MRS. WARREN: *querulously* Oh yes: everything I say is nonsense, according to you.

VIVIE: *turning to her quickly* No: really that is not so, mother. You have got completely the better of me tonight, though I intended it to be the other way. Let us be good friends now.

MRS. WARREN: *shaking her head a little ruefully* So it has been the other way. But I suppose I must give in to it. I always got the worst of it from Liz; and now I suppose it'll be the same with you.

VIVIE: Well, never mind. Come: good-night, dear old mother. *She takes her mother in her arms*

MRS. WARREN: *fondly* I brought you up well, didn't I, dearie?

VIVIE: You did.

MRS. WARREN: And youll be good to your poor old mother for it, won't you?

VIVIE: I will, dear. *Kissing her* Good-night.

MRS. WARREN: *with unction* Blessings on my own dearie darling! a mother's blessing!

She embraces her daughter protectingly, instinctively looking upward for divine sanction.

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

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