# Mrs. Warren's Profession - Act IV

di George Bernard Shaw (1898)

## ACT IV

*Honoria Fraser's chambers in Chancery Lane. An office at the top of New Stone Buildings, with a plate-glass window, distempered walls, electric light, and a patent stove. Saturday afternoon. The chimneys of Lincoln's Inn and the western sky beyond are seen through the window. There is a double writing table in the middle of the room, with a cigar box, ash pans, and a portable electric reading lamp almost snowed up in heaps of papers and books. This table has knee holes and chairs right and left and is very untidy. The clerk's desk, closed and tidy, with its high stool, is against the wall, near a door communicating with the inner rooms. In the opposite wall is the door leading to the public corridor. Its upper panel is of opaque glass, lettered in black on the outside, FRASER AND WARREN. A baize screen hides the corner between this door and the window.*

*Frank, in a fashionable light-colored coaching suit, with his stick, gloves, and white hat in his hands, is pacing up and down in the office. Somebody tries the door with a key.*

**FRANK:** *calling* Come in. It's not locked.

*Vivie comes in, in her hat and jacket. She stops and stares at him.*

**VIVIE:** *sternly* What are you doing here?

**FRANK:** Waiting to see you. I've been here for hours. Is this the way you attend to your business? *He puts his hat and stick on the table, and perches himself with a vault on the clerk's stool, looking at her with every appearance of being in a specially restless, teasing, flippant mood*

**VIVIE:** I've been away exactly twenty minutes for a cup of tea. *She takes off her hat and jacket and hangs them behind the screen* How did you get in?

**FRANK:** The staff had not left when I arrived. He's gone to play cricket on Primrose Hill. Why don't you employ a woman, and give your sex a chance?

**VIVIE:** What have you come for?

**FRANK:** *springing off the stool and coming close to her* Viv: lets go and enjoy the Saturday half-holiday somewhere, like the staff. What do you say to Richmond, and then a music hall, and a jolly supper?

**VIVIE:** Can't afford it. I shall put in another six hours work before I go to bed.

**FRANK:** Can't afford it, can't we? Aha! Look here. *He takes out a handful of sovereigns and makes them chink* Gold, Viv: gold!

**VIVIE:** Where did you get it?

**FRANK:** Gambling, Viv: gambling. Poker.

**VIVIE:** Pah! It's meaner than stealing it. No: I'm not coming. *She sits down to work at the table, with her back to the glass door, and begins turning over the papers*

**FRANK:** *remonstrating piteously* But, my dear Viv, I want to talk to you ever so seriously.

**VIVIE:** Very well: sit down in Honoria's chair and talk here. I like ten minutes chat after tea. *He murmurs* No use groaning: I'm inexorable. *He takes the opposite seat disconsolately* Pass that cigar box, will you?

**FRANK:** *pushing the cigar box across* Nasty womanly habit. Nice men don't do it any longer.

**VIVIE:** Yes: they object to the smell in the office; and we've had to take to cigarets. See! *She opens the box and takes out a cigaret, which she lights. She offers him one; but he shakes his head with a wry face. She settles herself comfortably in her chair, smoking* Go ahead.

**FRANK:** Well, I want to know what you've done—what arrangements you've made.

**VIVIE:** Everything was settled twenty minutes after I arrived here. Honoria has found the business too much for her this year; and she was on the point of sending for me and proposing a partnership when I walked in and told her I hadn't a farthing in the world. So I installed myself and packed her off for a fortnight's holiday. What happened at Haslemere when I left?

**FRANK:** Nothing at all. I said youd gone to town on particular business.

**VIVIE:** Well?

**FRANK:** Well, either they were too flabbergasted to say anything, or else Crofts had prepared your mother. Anyhow, she didn't say anything; and Crofts didn't say anything; and Praddy only stared. After tea they got up and went; and I've not seen them since.

**VIVIE:** *nodding placidly with one eye on a wreath of smoke* Thats all right.

**FRANK:** *looking round disparagingly* Do you intend to stick in this confounded place?

**VIVIE:** *blowing the wreath decisively away, and sitting straight up* Yes. These two days have given me back all my strength and self-possession. I will never take a holiday again as long as I live.

**FRANK:** *with a very wry face* Mps! You look quite happy. And as hard as nails.

**VIVIE:** *grimly* Well for me that I am!

**FRANK:** *rising* Look here, Viv: we must have an explanation. We parted the other day under a complete misunderstanding. *He sits on the table, close to her*

**VIVIE:** *putting away the cigaret* Well: clear it up.

**FRANK:** You remember what Crofts said.

**VIVIE:** Yes.

**FRANK:** That revelation was supposed to bring about a complete change in the nature of our feeling for one another. It placed us on the footing of brother and sister.

**VIVIE:** Yes.

**FRANK:** Have you ever had a brother?

**VIVIE:** No.

**FRANK:** Then you don't know what being brother and sister feels like? Now I have lots of sisters; and the fraternal feeling is quite familiar to me. I assure you my feeling for you is not the least in the world like it. The girls will go their way; I will go mine; and we shan't care if we never see one another again. Thats brother and sister. But as to you, I can't be easy if I have to pass a week without seeing you. Thats not brother and sister. Its exactly what I felt an hour before Crofts made his revelation. In short, dear Viv, it's love's young dream.

**VIVIE:** *bitingly* The same feeling, Frank, that brought your father to my mother's feet. Is that it?

**FRANK:** *so revolted that he slips off the table for a moment* I very strongly object, Viv, to have my feelings compared to any which the Reverend Samuel is capable of harboring; and I object still more to a comparison of you to your mother. *Resuming his perch* Besides, I don't believe the story. I have taxed my father with it, and obtained from him what I consider tantamount to a denial.

**VIVIE:** What did he say?

**FRANK:** He said he was sure there must be some mistake.

**VIVIE:** Do you believe him?

**FRANK:** I am prepared to take his word against Crofts'.

**VIVIE:** Does it make any difference? I mean in your imagination or conscience; for of course it makes no real difference.

**FRANK:** *shaking his head* None whatever to me.

**VIVIE:** Nor to me.

**FRANK:** *staring* But this is ever so surprising! *He goes back to his chair* I thought our whole relations were altered in your imagination and conscience, as you put it, the moment those words were out of that brute's muzzle.

**VIVIE:** No: it was not that. I didn't believe him. I only wish I could.

**FRANK:** Eh?

**VIVIE:** I think brother and sister would be a very suitable relation for us.

**FRANK:** You really mean that?

**VIVIE:** Yes. It's the only relation I care for, even if we could afford any other. I mean that.

**FRANK:** *raising his eyebrows like one on whom a new light has dawned, and rising with quite an effusion of chivalrous sentiment* My dear Viv: why didn't you say so before? I am ever so sorry for persecuting you. I understand, of course.

**VIVIE:** *puzzled* Understand what?

**FRANK:** Oh, I'm not a fool in the ordinary sense: only in the Scriptural sense of doing all the things the wise man declared to be folly, after trying them himself on the most extensive scale. I see I am no longer Vivvums's little boy. Don't be alarmed: I shall never call you Vivvums again—at least unless you get tired of your new little boy, whoever he may be.

**VIVIE:** My new little boy!

**FRANK:** *with conviction* Must be a new little boy. Always happens that way. No other way, in fact.

**VIVIE:** None that you know of, fortunately for you.

*Someone knocks at the door.*

**FRANK:** My curse upon yon caller, whoe'er he be!

**VIVIE:** It's Praed. He's going to Italy and wants to say goodbye. I asked him to call this afternoon. Go and let him in.

**FRANK:** We can continue our conversation after his departure for Italy. I'll stay him out. *He goes to the door and opens it* How are you, Praddy? Delighted to see you. Come in.

*Praed, dressed for travelling, comes in, in high spirits.*

**PRAED:** How do you do, Miss Warren? *She presses his hand cordially, though a certain sentimentality in his high spirits jars upon her* I start in an hour from Holborn Viaduct. I wish I could persuade you to try Italy.

**VIVIE:** What for?

**PRAED:** Why, to saturate yourself with beauty and romance, of course.

*Vivie, with a shudder, turns her chair to the table, as if the work waiting for her there were a support to her. Praed sits opposite to her. Frank places a chair near Vivie, and drops lazily and carelessly into it,*

*talking at her over his shoulder.*

**FRANK:** No use, Praddy. Viv is a little Philistine. She is indifferent to my romance, and insensible to my beauty.

**VIVIE:** Mr Praed: once for all, there is no beauty and no romance in life for me. Life is what it is; and I am prepared to take it as it is.

**PRAED:** *enthusiastically* You will not say that if you come with me to Verona and on to Venice. You will cry with delight at living in such a beautiful world.

**FRANK:** This is most eloquent, Praddy. Keep it up.

**PRAED:** Oh, I assure you I have cried—I shall cry again, I hope—at fifty! At your age, Miss Warren, you would not need to go so far as Verona. Your spirits would absolutely fly up at the mere sight of Ostend. You would be charmed with the gaiety, the vivacity, the happy air of Brussels.

**VIVIE:** *springing up with an exclamation of loathing* Agh!

**PRAED:** *rising* Whats the matter?

**FRANK:** *rising* Hallo, Viv!

**VIVIE:** *to Praed, with deep reproach* Can you find no better example of your beauty and romance than Brussels to talk to me about?

**PRAED:** *puzzled* Of course it's very different from Verona. I don't suggest for a moment that—

**VIVIE:** *bitterly* Probably the beauty and romance come to much the same in both places.

**PRAED:** *completely sobered and much concerned* My dear Miss Warren: I—[looking enquiringly at Frank] Is anything the matter?

**FRANK:** She thinks your enthusiasm frivolous, Praddy. She's had ever such a serious call.

**VIVIE:** *sharply* Hold your tongue, Frank. Don't be silly.

**FRANK:** *sitting down* Do you call this good manners, Praed?

**PRAED:** *anxious and considerate* Shall I take him away, Miss Warren? I feel sure we have disturbed you at your work.

**VIVIE:** Sit down: I'm not ready to go back to work yet. *Praed sits* You both think I have an attack of nerves. Not a bit of it. But there are two subjects I want dropped, if you don't mind.

**VIVIE:** One of them *to Frank* is love's young dream in any shape or form: the other *to Praed* is the romance and beauty of life, especially Ostend and the gaiety of Brussels. You are welcome to any illusions you may have left on these subjects: I have none. If we three are to remain friends, I must be treated as a woman of business, permanently single *to Frank* and permanently unromantic *to Praed*

**FRANK:** I also shall remain permanently single until you change your mind. Praddy: change the subject. Be eloquent about something else.

**PRAED:** *diffidently* I'm afraid theres nothing else in the world that I can talk about. The Gospel of Art is the only one I can preach. I know Miss Warren is a great devotee of the Gospel of Getting On; but we can't discuss that without hurting your feelings, Frank, since you are determined not to get on.

**FRANK:** Oh, don't mind my feelings. Give me some improving advice by all means: it does me ever so much good. Have another try to make a successful man of me, Viv. Come: lets have it all: energy, thrift, foresight, self-respect, character. Don't you hate people who have no character, Viv?

**VIVIE:** *wincing* Oh, stop, stop. Let us have no more of that horrible cant. Mr Praed: if there are really

only those two gospels in the world, we had better all kill ourselves; for the same taint is in both, through and through.

**FRANK:** *looking critically at her* There is a touch of poetry about you today, Viv, which has hitherto been lacking.

**PRAED:** *remonstrating* My dear Frank: aren't you a little unsympathetic?

**VIVIE:** *merciless to herself* No: it's good for me. It keeps me from being sentimental.

**FRANK:** *bantering her* Checks your strong natural propensity that way, don't it?

**VIVIE:** *almost hysterically* Oh yes: go on: don't spare me. I was sentimental for one moment in my life—beautifully sentimental—by moonlight; and now—

**FRANK:** *quickly* I say, Viv: take care. Don't give yourself away.

**VIVIE:** Oh, do you think Mr Praed does not know all about my mother? *Turning on Praed* You had better have told me that morning, Mr Praed. You are very old fashioned in your delicacies, after all.

**PRAED:** Surely it is you who are a little old fashioned in your prejudices, Miss Warren. I feel bound to tell you, speaking as an artist, and believing that the most intimate human relationships are far beyond and above the scope of the law, that though I know that your mother is an unmarried woman, I do not respect her the less on that account. I respect her more.

**FRANK:** *airily* Hear! hear!

**VIVIE:** *staring at him* Is that all you know?

**PRAED:** Certainly that is all.

**VIVIE:** Then you neither of you know anything. Your guesses are innocence itself compared with the truth.

**PRAED:** *rising, startled and indignant, and preserving his politeness with an effort* I hope not. *More emphatically* I hope not, Miss Warren.

**FRANK:** *whistles* Whew!

**VIVIE:** You are not making it easy for me to tell you, Mr Praed.

**PRAED:** *his chivalry drooping before their conviction* If there is anything worse—that is, anything else—are you sure you are right to tell us, Miss Warren?

**VIVIE:** I am sure that if I had the courage I should spend the rest of my life in telling everybody—stamping and branding it into them until they all felt their part in its abomination as I feel mine. There is nothing I despise more than the wicked convention that protects these things by forbidding a woman to mention them. And yet I can't tell you. The two infamous words that describe what my mother is are ringing in my ears and struggling on my tongue; but I can't utter them: the shame of them is too horrible for me. *She buries her face in her hands. The two men, astonished, stare at one another and then at her. She raises her head again desperately and snatches a sheet of paper and a pen* Here: let me draft you a prospectus.

**FRANK:** Oh, she's mad. Do you hear, Viv? mad. Come! pull yourself together.

**VIVIE:** You shall see. *She writes* "Paid up capital: not less than forty thousand pounds standing in the name of Sir George Crofts, Baronet, the chief shareholder. Premises at Brussels, Ostend, Vienna, and Budapest. Managing director: Mrs Warren"; and now don't let us forget h e r qualifications: the two words. *She writes the words and pushes the paper to them* There! Oh no: don't read it: don't! *She snatches it back and tears it to pieces; then seizes her head in her hands and hides her face*

*on the table*

*Frank, who has watched the writing over her shoulder, and opened his eyes very widely at it, takes a card from his pocket; scribbles the two words on it; and silently hands it to Praed, who reads it with amazement, and hides it hastily in his pocket.*

**FRANK:** *whispering tenderly* Viv, dear: thats all right. I read what you wrote: so did Praddy. We understand. And we remain, as this leaves us at present, yours ever so devotedly.

**PRAED:** We do indeed, Miss Warren. I declare you are the most splendidly courageous woman I ever met.

*This sentimental compliment braces Vivie. She throws it away from her with an impatient shake, and forces herself to stand up, though not without some support from the table.*

**FRANK:** Don't stir, Viv, if you don't want to. Take it easy.

**VIVIE:** Thank you. You an always depend on me for two things: not to cry and not to faint. *She moves a few steps towards the door of the inner room, and stops close to Praed to say* I shall need much more courage than that when I tell my mother that we have come to a parting of the ways. Now I must go into the next room for a moment to make myself neat again, if you don't mind.

**PRAED:** Shall we go away?

**VIVIE:** No: I'll be back presently. Only for a moment. *She goes into the other room, Praed opening the door for her*

**PRAED:** What an amazing revelation! I'm extremely disappointed in Crofts: I am indeed.

**FRANK:** I'm not in the least. I feel he's perfectly accounted for at last. But what a facer for me, Praddy! I can't marry her now.

**PRAED:** *sternly* Frank! *The two look at one another, Frank unruffled, Praed deeply indignant* Let me tell you, Gardner, that if you desert her now you will behave very despicably.

**FRANK:** Good old Praddy! Ever chivalrous! But you mistake: it's not the moral aspect of the case: it's the money aspect. I really can't bring myself to touch the old woman's money now.

**PRAED:** And was that what you were going to marry on?

**FRANK:** What else? I havn't any money, nor the smallest turn for making it. If I married Viv now she would have to support me; and I should cost her more than I am worth.

**PRAED:** But surely a clever bright fellow like you can make something by your own brains.

**FRANK:** Oh yes, a little. *He takes out his money again* I made all that yesterday in an hour and a half. But I made it in a highly speculative business. No, dear Praddy: even if Bessie and Georgina marry millionaires and the governor dies after cutting them off with a shilling, I shall have only four hundred a year. And he won't die until he's three score and ten: he hasn't originality enough. I shall be on short allowance for the next twenty years. No short allowance for Viv, if I can help it. I withdraw gracefully and leave the field to the gilded youth of England. So that settled. I shan't worry her about it: I'll just send her a little note after we're gone. She'll understand.

**PRAED:** *grasping his hand* Good fellow, Frank! I heartily beg your pardon. But must you never see her again?

**FRANK:** Never see her again! Hang it all, be reasonable. I shall come along as often as possible, and be her brother. I can not understand the absurd consequences you romantic people expect from the most ordinary transactions. *A knock at the door* I wonder who this is. Would you mind opening the door? If it's a client it will look more respectable than if I appeared.

**PRAED:** Certainly. *He goes to the door and opens it. Frank sits down in Vivie's chair to scribble a note*

My dear Kitty: come in: come in.

*Mrs Warren comes in, looking apprehensively around for Vivie. She has done her best to make herself matronly and dignified. The brilliant hat is replaced by a sober bonnet, and the gay blouse covered by a costly black silk mantle. She is pitiably anxious and ill at ease: evidently panic-stricken.*

**MRS. WARREN:** *to Frank* What! Y o u r e here, are you?

**FRANK:** *turning in his chair from his writing, but not rising* Here, and charmed to see you. You come like a breath of spring.

**MRS. WARREN:** Oh, get out with your nonsense. *In a low voice* Where's Vivie?

*Frank points expressively to the door of the inner room, but says nothing.*

**MRS. WARREN:** *sitting down suddenly and almost beginning to cry* Praddy: won't she see me, don't you think?

**PRAED:** My dear Kitty: don't distress yourself. Why should she not?

**MRS. WARREN:** Oh, you never can see why not: youre too innocent. Mr Frank: did she say anything to you?

**FRANK:** *folding his note* She must see you, if *very expressively* you wait til she comes in.

**MRS. WARREN:** *frightened* Why shouldn't I wait?

*Frank looks quizzically at her; puts his note carefully on the ink-bottle, so that Vivie cannot fail to find it when next she dips her pen; then rises and devotes his attention entirely to her.*

**FRANK:** My dear Mrs Warren: suppose you were a sparrow—ever so tiny and pretty a sparrow hopping in the roadway—and you saw a steam roller coming in your direction, would you wait for it?

**MRS. WARREN:** Oh, don't bother me with your sparrows. What did she run away from Haslemere like that for?

**FRANK:** I'm afraid she'll tell you if you rashly await her return.

**MRS. WARREN:** Do you want me to go away?

**FRANK:** No: I always want you to stay. But I advise you to go away.

**MRS. WARREN:** What! And never see her again!

**FRANK:** Precisely.

**MRS. WARREN:** *crying again* Praddy: don't let him be cruel to me. *She hastily checks her tears and wipes her eyes* She'll be so angry if she sees I've been crying.

**FRANK:** *with a touch of real compassion in his airy tenderness* You know that Praddy is the soul of kindness, Mrs Warren. Praddy: what do you say? Go or stay?

**PRAED:** *to Mrs Warren* I really should be very sorry to cause you unnecessary pain; but I think perhaps you had better not wait. The fact is—[Vivie is heard at the inner door]

**FRANK:** Sh! Too late. She's coming.

**MRS. WARREN:** Don't tell her I was crying. *Vivie comes in. She stops gravely on seeing Mrs Warren, who greets her with hysterical cheerfulness* Well, dearie. So here you are at last.

**VIVIE:** I am glad you have come: I want to speak to you. You said you were going, Frank, I think.

**FRANK:** Yes. Will you come with me, Mrs Warren? What do you say to a trip to Richmond, and the theatre in the evening? There is safety in Richmond. No steam roller there.

**VIVIE:** Nonsense, Frank. My mother will stay here.

**MRS. WARREN:** *scared* I don't know: perhaps I'd better go. We're disturbing you at your work.

**VIVIE:** *with quiet decision* Mr Praed: please take Frank away. Sit down, mother. *Mrs Warren obeys helplessly*

**PRAED:** Come, Frank. Goodbye, Miss Vivie.

**VIVIE:** *shaking hands* Goodbye. A pleasant trip.

**PRAED:** Thank you: thank you. I hope so.

**FRANK:** *to Mrs Warren* Goodbye: youd ever so much better have taken my advice. *He shakes hands with her. Then airily to Vivie* Byebye, Viv.

**VIVIE:** Goodbye. *He goes out gaily without shaking hands with her*

**PRAED:** *sadly* Goodbye, Kitty.

**MRS. WARREN:** *snivelling—oobye!*

*Praed goes. Vivie, composed and extremely grave, sits down in Honoria's chair, and waits for her mother to speak. Mrs Warren, dreading a pause, loses no time in beginning.*

**MRS. WARREN:** Well, Vivie, what did you go away like that for without saying a word to me! How could you do such a thing! And what have you done to poor George? I wanted him to come with me; but he shuffled out of it. I could see that he was quite afraid of you. Only fancy: he wanted me not to come. As if *trembling* I should be afraid of you, dearie. *Vivie's gravity deepens* But of course I told him it was all settled and comfortable between us, and that we were on the best of terms. *She breaks down* Vivie: whats the meaning of this? *She produces a commercial envelope, and fumbles at the enclosure with trembling fingers* I got it from the bank this morning.

**VIVIE:** It is my month's allowance. They sent it to me as usual the other day. I simply sent it back to be placed to your credit, and asked them to send you the lodgment receipt. In future I shall support myself.

**MRS. WARREN:** *not daring to understand* Wasn't it enough? Why didn't you tell me? *With a cunning gleam in her eye* I'll double it: I was intending to double it. Only let me know how much you want.

**VIVIE:** You know very well that that has nothing to do with it. From this time I go my own way in my own business and among my own friends. And you will go yours. *She rises* Goodbye.

**MRS. WARREN:** *rising, appalled* Goodbye?

**VIVIE:** Yes: goodbye. Come: don't let us make a useless scene: you understand perfectly well. Sir George Crofts has told me the whole business.

**MRS. WARREN:** *angrily* Silly old—[Sheswallows an epithet, and then turns white at the narrowness of her escape from uttering it]

**VIVIE:** Just so.

**MRS. WARREN:** He ought to have his tongue cut out. But I thought it was ended: you said you didn't mind.

**VIVIE:** *steadfastly* Excuse me: I do mind.

**MRS. WARREN:** But I explained—

**VIVIE:** You explained how it came about. You did not tell me that it is still going on *She sits*

*Mrs Warren, silenced for a moment, looks forlornly at Vivie, who waits, secretly hoping that the combat is over. But the cunning expression comes back into Mrs Warren's face; and she bends across the table, sly and urgent, half whispering.*

**MRS. WARREN:** Vivie: do you know how rich I am?

**VIVIE:** I have no doubt you are very rich.

**MRS. WARREN:** But you don't know all that that means; youre too young. It means a new dress every day; it means theatres and balls every night; it means having the pick of all the gentlemen in Europe at your feet; it means a lovely house and plenty of servants; it means the choicest of eating and drinking; it means everything you like, everything you want, everything you can think of. And what are you here? A mere drudge, toiling and moiling early and late for your bare living and two cheap dresses a year. Think over it. *Soothingly* Youre shocked, I know. I can enter into your feelings; and I think they do you credit; but trust me, nobody will blame you: you may take my word for that. I know what young girls are; and I know youll think better of it when you've turned it over in your mind.

**VIVIE:** So that's how it is done, is it? You must have said all that to many a woman, to have it so pat.

**MRS. WARREN:** *passionately* What harm am I asking you to do? *Vivie turns away contemptuously. Mrs Warren continues desperately* Vivie: listen to me: you don't understand: you were taught wrong on purpose: you don't know what the world is really like.

**VIVIE:** *arrested* Taught wrong on purpose! What do you mean?

**MRS. WARREN:** I mean that youre throwing away all your chances for nothing. You think that people are what they pretend to be: that the way you were taught at school and college to think right and proper is the way things really are. But it's not: it's all only a pretence, to keep the cowardly slavish common run of people quiet. Do you want to find that out, like other women, at forty, when you've thrown yourself away and lost your chances; or won't you take it in good time now from your own mother, that loves you and swears to you that it's truth: gospel truth? *Urgently* Vivie: the big people, the clever people, the managing people, all know it. They do as I do, and think what I think. I know plenty of them. I know them to speak to, to introduce you to, to make friends of for you. I don't mean anything wrong: thats what you don't understand: your head is full of ignorant ideas about me. What do the people that taught you know about life or about people like me? When did they ever meet me, or speak to me, or let anyone tell them about me? the fools! Would they ever have done anything for you if I hadn't paid them? Havn't I told you that I want you to be respectable? Havn't I brought you up to be respectable? And how can you keep it up without my money and my influence and Lizzie's friends? Can't you see that youre cutting your own throat as well as breaking my heart in turning your back on me?

**VIVIE:** I recognize the Crofts philosophy of life, mother. I heard it all from him that day at the Gardners'.

**MRS. WARREN:** You think I want to force that played-out old sot on you! I don't, Vivie: on my oath I don't.

**VIVIE:** It would not matter if you did: you would not succeed. *Mrs Warren winces, deeply hurt by the implied indifference towards her affectionate intention. Vivie, neither understanding this nor concerning herself about it, goes on calmly* Mother: you don't at all know the sort of person I am. I don't object to Crofts more than to any other coarsely built man of his class. To tell you the truth, I rather admire him for being strongminded enough to enjoy himself in his own way and make plenty of money instead of living the usual shooting, hunting, dining-out, tailoring, loafing life of his set merely because all the rest do it. And I'm perfectly aware that if I'd been in the same circumstances as my aunt Liz, I'd have done exactly what she did.

**VIVIE:** I don't think I'm more prejudiced or straitlaced than you: I think I'm less. I'm certain I'm less sentimental. I know very well that fashionable morality is all a pretence, and that if I took your money and devoted the rest of my life to spending it fashionably, I might be as worthless and vicious as the silliest woman could possibly be without having a word said to me about it. But I

don't want to be worthless. I shouldn't enjoy trotting about the park to advertize my dressmaker and carriage builder, or being bored at the opera to shew off a shopwindowful of diamonds.

**MRS. WARREN:** *bewildered* But—

**VIVIE:** Wait a moment: I've not done. Tell me why you continue your business now that you are independent of it. Your sister, you told me, has left all that behind her. Why don't you do the same?

**MRS. WARREN:** Oh, it's all very easy for Liz: she likes good society, and has the air of being a lady. Imagine me in a cathedral town! Why, the very rooks in the trees would find me out even if I could stand the dulness of it. I must have work and excitement, or I should go melancholy mad. And what else is there for me to do? The life suits me: I'm fit for it and not for anything else. If I didn't do it somebody else would; so I don't do any real harm by it. And then it brings in money; and I like making money. No: it's no use: I can't give it up—not for anybody. But what need you know about it? I'll never mention it. I'll keep Crofts away. I'll not trouble you much: you see I have to be constantly running about from one place to another. Youll be quit of me altogether when I die.

**VIVIE:** No: I am my mother's daughter. I am like you: I must have work, and must make more money than I spend. But my work is not your work, and my way is not your way. We must part. It will not make much difference to us: instead of meeting one another for perhaps a few months in twenty years, we shall never meet: thats all.

**MRS. WARREN:** *her voice stifled in tears* Vivie: I meant to have been more with you: I did indeed.

**VIVIE:** It's no use, mother: I am not to be changed by a few cheap tears and entreaties any more than you are, I daresay.

**MRS. WARREN:** *wildly* Oh, you call a mother's tears cheap.

**VIVIE:** They cost you nothing; and you ask me to give you the peace and quietness of my whole life in exchange for them. What use would my company be to you if you could get it? What have we two in common that could make either of us happy together?

**MRS. WARREN:** *lapsing recklessly into her dialect* We're mother and daughter. I want my daughter. I've a right to you. Who is to care for me when I'm old? Plenty of girls have taken to me like daughters and cried at leaving me; but I let them all go because I had you to look forward to. I kept myself lonely for you. You've no right to turn on me now and refuse to do your duty as a daughter.

**VIVIE:** *jarred and antagonized by the echo of the slums in her mother's voice* My duty as a daughter! I thought we should come to that presently. Now once for all, mother, you want a daughter and Frank wants a wife. I don't want a mother; and I don't want a husband. I have spared neither Frank nor myself in sending him about his business. Do you think I will spare you?

**MRS. WARREN:** *violently* Oh, I know the sort you are: no mercy for yourself or anyone else. I know. My experience has done that for me anyhow: I can tell the pious, canting, hard, selfish woman when I meet her. Well, keep yourself to yourself: I don't want you. But listen to this. Do you know what I would do with you if you were a baby again? aye, as sure as there's a Heaven above us.

**VIVIE:** Strangle me, perhaps.

**MRS. WARREN:** No: I'd bring you up to be a real daughter to me, and not what you are now, with your pride and your prejudices and the college education you stole from me: yes, stole: deny it if you can: what was it but stealing? I'd bring you up in my own house, I would.

**VIVIE:** *quietly* In one of your own houses.

**MRS. WARREN:** *screaming* Listen to her! listen to how she spits on her mother's grey hairs! Oh, may

you live to have your own daughter tear and trample on you as you have trampled on me. And you will: you will. No woman ever had luck with a mother's curse on her.

**VIVIE:** I wish you wouldn't rant, mother. It only hardens me. Come: I suppose I am the only young woman you ever had in your power that you did good to. Don't spoil it all now.

**MRS. WARREN:** Yes, Heaven forgive me, it's true; and you are the only one that ever turned on me. Oh, the injustice of it! the injustice! the injustice! I always wanted to be a good woman. I tried honest work; and I was slave-driven until I cursed the day I ever heard of honest work. I was a good mother; and because I made my daughter a good woman she turns me out as if I were a leper. Oh, if I only had my life to live over again! I'd talk to that lying clergyman in the school. From this time forth, so help me Heaven in my last hour, I'll do wrong and nothing but wrong. And I'll prosper on it.

**VIVIE:** Yes: it's better to choose your line and go through with it. If I had been you, mother, I might have done as you did; but I should not have lived one life and believed in another. You are a conventional woman at heart. That is why I am bidding you goodbye now. I am right, am I not?

**MRS. WARREN:** *taken aback* Right to throw away all my money!

**VIVIE:** No: right to get rid of you? I should be a fool not to. Isn't that so?

**MRS. WARREN:** *sulkily* Oh well, yes, if you come to that, I suppose you are. But Lord help the world if everybody took to doing the right thing! And now I'd better go than stay where I'm not wanted. *She turns to the door*

**VIVIE:** *kindly* Won't you shake hands?

**MRS. WARREN:** *after looking at her fiercely for a moment with a savage impulse to strike her* No, thank you. Goodbye.

**VIVIE:** *matter-of-factly* Goodbye. *Mrs Warren goes out, slamming the door behind her. The strain on Vivie's face relaxes; her grave expression breaks up into one of joyous content; her breath goes out in a half sob, half laugh of intense relief. She goes buoyantly to her place at the writing table; pushes the electric lamp out of the way; pulls over a great sheaf of papers; and is in the act of dipping her pen in the ink when she finds Frank's note. She opens it unconcernedly and reads it quickly, giving a little laugh at some quaint turn of expression in it* And goodbye, Frank. *She tears the note up and tosses the pieces into the wastepaper basket without a second thought. Then she goes at her work with a plunge, and soon becomes absorbed in its figures*

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

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