**summary: Act One, Beginning of play to Bluntschli’s entry**

The play begins in a small town “near the Dragoman Pass” in Bulgaria, in the bedroom of a young woman named Raina Petkoff. It’s November 1885, and a war is on between the Bulgarian troops with their Russian allies, and the combined Serbian forces. The Serbian forces include many soldiers hired from other nations. The scene description, in italics, sets a pattern for the rest of the play. Although there is no official narrator and the scene descriptions are in essence only for the eyes of the company putting on the play, they contain a significant amount of detail not perceptible to a viewing audience. Only a reader knows these details. This includes, for example, notes on the mental states of some of the characters. The notes describe Rainia’s room’s décor as lavish, if somewhat kitschy. There are chocolate cream candies visible on a dresser. Raina gazes out her open window, and her mother, Catherine Petkoff, enters, telling Raina to close the windows because it’s cold outside. Catherine is excited and delivers news that the Bulgarian-Russian army has won a great battle at Slivnitza, against the Serbians and their allies. Catherine also states that a man named Sergius is responsible for leading the cavalry in the victory. Raina is overjoyed and relieved on hearing this. Raina admits to Catherine that, in Raina’s lonelier moments, she has doubted whether the Bulgarians can compare in cultivation and elegance to the Russians. Raina has also wondered whether men in battle really are as heroic as she has read about in the works of Pushkin and Byron. Catherine tells Raina she should be ashamed to have doubted the Bulgarians, and Sergius in particular. Louka, their maid, enters, and says that all windows and doors in the house should be closed and locked because there are fleeing Serbians in the area, and they might try to hide in Bulgarian houses. Catherine leaves the room to make sure the house is safe and in order. When Catherine is gone, Louka privately tells Raina that she can push open one of the shutters against Catherine’s wishes to continue listening to the battle, as one shutter does not bolt properly. Raina scolds Louka aloud for contradicting Catherine’s advice. Louka leaves, and Raina lies awake listening to the gunfire approach the house. At first Raina finds this exciting, but soon realizes that the scattered Serbian army is very close by. She hears the shutters rattle, and in a moment a man strikes a match in the room, telling Raina to be quiet or he’ll shoot her.

**Analysis**

Shaw introduces, in this first section of the first act, some of the motivating ideas and problems of the play. One of them is the nature of “genteel,” or wealthy, society, and the harsher reality of war, which is, in this sequence, just outside Raina’s windows. Raina idolizes Sergius, who is conveniently represented only as a perfect photograph in these scenes. In her own home and bedroom, Raina thinks of Sergius as an engaging hero in battle. She is pleased, therefore, to have her mother Catherine corroborate this fantasy. Shaw’s stage directions demonstrate how descriptions of scenes might undercut the action that is being performed on the stage, visible to the audience in the theater. The decorations in Raina’s room appear fancy, but they are a bit tacky on closer inspection, according to the meticulous stage directions. The decorations are signals, therefore, not of wealth but of a desire for more wealth, more “cultivation,” than perhaps the family really has. This, too, is an undercurrent in the play, that Bulgaria and the Bulgarian nobility exist in the shadow of more culturally-developed countries like Russia and the Austrian Empire. The Petkoffs go out of their way to demonstrate that they just as learned and up to date, but these efforts only point up their fear that they in fact are not so advanced after all.

Also evident in this sequence is the family’s reliance on Sergius as a kind of savior figure. If he is the hero of the battle, then he is all the more suited to be Raina’s husband in the eyes of the Petkoffs. Raina’s marriageability is of prime importance to the members of her family, and even to the servants in the house, as it will bring honor to their family. The ideas of reputation, honesty, and honor are complicated throughout the play. Sergius will prove to be far more three-dimensional than his picture in Raina’s room would suggest. Raina’s virtue will also be tested. The transformation of different characters’ moral states and reputations is one of the great dramas of the work.

**Summary: Act One, Bluntschli’s entry to end of Act One**

The man, as the stage notes describe, is of “undistinguished” appearance. He does not seem as impressive a solider as the picture of Sergius that Raina keeps in her room. Raina is surprised at the man’s cleverness, and that he seems more interested in preserving his life than in behaving as a soldier “should.” The man threatens again to kill Raina if she draws attention to him. Raina counters that she is not afraid to die. The man responds that, if Bulgarians were to enter and kill him, they would be left alone in Raina’s room with her only in her bedclothes. The man implies that this would be a dangerous predicament for Raina, and she agrees, though is revolted. She gets up to find her cloak to cover herself, but the man takes it, as a guarantee that Raina will keep quiet, so that no soldiers come in and see her scantily clothed He calls the cloak a weapon more powerful than a pistol. A bustling is heard outside the room. Catherine and Louka are coming, and just before they enter, Raina tells the man to hide behind a curtain. He does, and Catherine and Louka ask if everything is all right. They bring in a polite young soldier of the Bulgarian army, who reports that a runaway from the Serbians might be on the balcony and attempt to get into the house. Raina denies this possibility, testily, but she allows the soldier to search the area. He, Catherine, and Louka find no one and wish Raina good night. Raina tells Louka to stay with her mother the rest of the evening, as she, Raina, pretends to be worried that Catherine will need protection from the retreating Serbians. In a stage direction, the reader learns that Louka makes a strange face at Raina when she says this. Louka is aware Raina is up to something suspicious. When the three leave the room, the man emerges from the curtain, relieved at not having been found out. He says he is indebted to Raina for protecting him. Raina cries out, realizing that the man has left his pistol in plain sight on the ottoman while the other three were present. The man says they were lucky, and that Raina shouldn’t worry, since the gun isn’t loaded. Indeed, he has no space for extra cartridges in his pockets, because he usually only carries chocolates in them, although he has just run out. Raina finds this behavior unbecoming for a soldier, but the man says that carrying candy is a sign of a veteran, rather than a novice.

Raina offers the man her chocolate cream candies, which he loves and eats. The man discusses the cavalry charge from the earlier in the day. He insults the leader of the Bulgarian side, which he does not know was Raina’s future husband, Sergius. Although Raina thinks that Sergius’ behavior was heroic, the man claims that it was instead foolish, unprofessional, and showy. After all, the man continues, the Serbians had machine guns and the Bulgarians and Russians had only horses. In most circumstances, the charge would have been a death sentence for the Bulgarian side, as the machine guns would have mowed them down immediately. But the Serbian forces were supplied with the wrong kind of cartridges for their guns, and only because of this were they defeated by the advancing Bulgarians. Thus Sergius and his cavalry won the battle, but only from sheer luck, and in the face of his own catastrophic military decision-making. Raina is shocked by this news and angry at the man for delivering it. She says she cannot allow the man to stay in her bedroom, since he has now spoken ill of her future husband. The man begs to be permitted to hide in her bedroom, because if she forces him outside, he will surely be killed. He only wants to sleep, but prepares to leave anyway. Raina stops him and brags that her family is famous for its hospitality. She says that if the man had asked for her pity instead of pointing a gun at her, Raina would have helped him. Raina continues bragging about her family’s wealth, and that they have the only library in Bulgaria. They are so cultured, compared to other Bulgarians, that they even wash regularly. The man seems subtly amused by this, and notes that the man’s father owns six hotels, although Raina appears not to notice this indication of his family’s station in society.

Raina tells the man to stay awake and alert while she informs her mother, Catherine, of the situation, since her father, Major Petkoff, is still off at battle. The man promises not to sleep. But when Raina is gone, he stumbles over to her bed and falls asleep instantly. Catherine and Raina return to find the man this way. Catherine is shocked and wants to wake him, but Raina begs Catherine to let him be.

**Analysis**

The man, whose name is later revealed to be Bluntschli, is arguably the Drama's most captivating presence, apart from Raina. He is from Switzerland, and as he notes here, he fights not out of a sense of patriotism to Serbia. He is a professional soldier, or mercenary, who fights for whatever army needs soldiers and can pay them. He could have chosen another career path, but his gift is clearly for the art of war. While he is talented and knowledgeable about war, Bluntschli the soldier does not have the idealized version of military behavior. He wants to protect his own life, and he is willing to ransom Raina’s safety to do so. He carries candy instead of ammunition in his pockets. He gets scared when Raina screams. And he gets sleepy, although he has stayed awake, at that point in the play, for days. In short, Bluntschli, the “chocolate cream soldier,” is not a hypothetical soldier, he is not simply an abstract idea of a heroic warrior, as Sergius is to Raina. He is a real man, and his strengths and weaknesses point to something deeper about him, which is a kind of self-honesty that the other characters do not seem to possess. Bluntschli is fairly self-aware, and seems to know his motivations and desires very well. He sees through Sergius’ duplicity and blind heroism, and through the Petkoff family’s self-aggrandizement. He does this without drawing attention to himself. Bluntschli implies in this passage that his Swiss family is bourgeois, meaning that they have perhaps a great deal of money. His father owns six hotels, insinuating that the money was made through work and not through the inheritance of an illustrious family, like Raina’s. The Petkoffs’ wealth is of that second kind, and they are sure to tell to anyone who might ask that they are “old money” in Bulgaria, cultivated and refined, with enormous social stature. Bluntschli is not as enthused by this as Sergius likely is, and Raina seems to sense that. It is perhaps another reason why she values Bluntschli’s opinion and eventually becomes upset with Sergius’s hypocrisy. Raina’s behavior in these scenes is harder to pin down. She clearly takes a liking to the man from the beginning, but she alternates in her behavior toward him, from disgust at his apparent fear of battle and willingness to save his life, to maternal care when he is drowsy and sleeping. Raina is attracted to him but is not sure why, as Bluntschli seems the opposite of Sergius in so many ways. Bluntschli is pragmatic and Sergius grandiose. Bluntschli is a logical man who plays according to chance, while the Sergius drives into battle without any consideration other than how he might look on a horse. It is a signal of Raina’s character development that she shifts her devotions from Sergius to Bluntschli, from the apparently classic hero to a soldier with a deeper kind of steadfastness. Though Sergius and Bluntschli seem to be opposites, this part of Act One is important because it debunks the widespread idea that everyone must be good or bad, heroic or cowardly, perfect or flawed. In reality, nothing is black and white. Even though Sergius is praised as a hero, we learn that his cavalry charge was in fact foolish. Likewise, even though Bluntschli isn’t prepared to die for a cause, as society’s ideal heroic soldier would, he is in fact more knowledgeable about war than Sergius. Shaw’s characters mirror the complexity and murkiness of war, as the “hero” turns out to have major flaws, and the more practical, knowledgeable soldier carries chocolates instead of ammunition. Sergius and Bluntschli seem to destroy the idea of war as a glorified act. Bluntschli’s vulnerability at the end of Act One, when he is sleeping soundly despite having stated that he would not, is an important instance for the play. It marks an ironic moment in which Raina decides to protect a man whose profession is to protect others. It also marks the moment when Raina admits to her mother that she has been harboring a fugitive, and convinces her mother to help her with it. It creates the central secret of the play that will motivate the second and third acts. That is, at least until other characters reveal secrets of their own.