**Summary: Beginning of Act Three to Nicola’s conversation with Louka**

The scene shifts to the library, where Bluntschli is drawing up the troop movements for Petkoff and Sergius, both of who are in awe of his abilities. Petkoff wonders where his old coat went. He’s wearing a replacement and doesn’t like it. Catherine tells him his coat is in the closest where he left it, and Petkoff bets a large sum it isn’t there. When Nicola does in fact bring the coat in, Petkoff is flummoxed and Catherine and Raina are not surprised, as it was Bluntschli who returned that coat the same morning. Sergius and Petkoff leave the library, Sergius somewhat embarrassed by Bluntschli’s expertise and leadership in drawing up the plans for the troops. Raina and Bluntschli are alone for the first time since his arrival. Raina says that Bluntschli looks better than he did the first time they met, and he replies that he’s had a chance to wash up. Raina, pressing him, gets him to admit that he told the story of hiding in Raina’s to only one man, whom Bluntschli trusted. But he learns from Raina that that man relayed this story to Petkoff and Sergius in the encampment. This worries Bluntschli, and Raina says that, if Sergius finds out that Bluntschli is the soldier from the story, he’ll challenge Bluntschli to a duel.

Bluntschli replies that Raina should not tell Sergius his identity. Raina is aghast at this, since it would mean her telling a lie. She says she has only lied one other time in her life, which was when she told the army officer that Bluntschli wasn’t present in her room. Bluntschli says that, in his line of work, lying is commonplace, as is people trying to save their lives. He has no trouble with Raina’s lying, which she sees as a slip in character. He believes she should keep the secret from Sergius. When Raina becomes even more indignant, Bluntschli tells her to stop acting high and mighty. This shocks Raina thoroughly. She admits that no man has ever spoken to her honestly, and without idolizing her. She says that Bluntschli doesn’t take her seriously, but he replies that he’s in fact the first man to take her seriously. Bluntschli declares that is infatuated with Raina. She admits to leaving a picture of herself for Bluntschli in the pocket of her father’s coat that Bluntschli wore when he escaped the house. She assumed he would have seen it there. But Bluntschli did not find the picture, and Raina figures it must still be present in the pocket of the coat that Petkoff is now wearing. Bluntschli admits that he’s not sure whether the picture is there, on second thought, because he had the coat pawned during the battle before he reclaimed it. This horrifies Raina. Louka enters to deliver a letter for Bluntschli that says his father has died. Bluntschli responds with dismay only at all the affairs that must be sorted out, since, Bluntschli realizes, his father was manager of far more hotels than he thought initially. Bluntschli leaves to begin planning his departure. Raina departs, and Nicola enters, finding Louka alone.

**Analysis**

Bluntschli has an incredible knowledge of warcraft. The nature of how to fight wars is a recurring topic in the play. Characters wonder whether being a good soldier, for example, entails being a hero or being valiant in the face of danger. Bluntschli upends that paradigm. He is someone who understands military tactics better than anyone. He views this calling as a trade, rather than as an exalted, romantic position demanding the utmost of him unto death. What makes Bluntschli a good soldier is his ability to use practicality, reason, and large amounts of information instead of getting caught up in ego or inflated pride. Sergius, of course, is the opposite. Although he did in fact lead the successful cavalry charge, Sergius and his soldiers would have been killed had the Serbs’ machine guns not malfunctioned. It was only by chance that the guns did not fire and slaughter the Bulgarians. Sergius goes on to prove his incompetence by failing to earn a promotion, despite his fame for the charge. This causes Sergius to resign his prized military commission. By contrast, Bluntschli, who does not care much for the trappings of war and state like officers’ titles, manages to keep his military commission. Bluntschli helps Petkoff when he is in need by using his reason and patience on a set of maps and troop guides. This same level-headedness is at play when Bluntschli tells Raina how she should deal with her family and with Sergius, regarding that first night in her bedroom. In short, Bluntschli tells her to lie, because a lie would be much easier for everyone. Raina at first protests, saying she never lies, but then realizes that Bluntschli knows she is an adept liar, than she can manipulate settings to get what she wants from people. The very fact that Bluntschli is the first to realize this truth about Raina causes her to fall more deeply in love with him, even though, in a sense, it is the farthest thing from classic romance. It is indeed a realization that Raina is only a human being and that she has desires like anyone else. This of course is Bluntschli’s belief: that soldiers, too, have desires, foremost among them being the desire to stay alive in battles where a great many must perish. Bluntschli, in short, believes that certain circumstances call for lying, if the lie is in the service of some greater good, either personal or social. Here Shaw continues to test the line between truth and falsehood. In getting Raina to admit that she is sometimes false in order to receive what she wants from people, Bluntschli arrives at something true about Raina, something that seems to be true of most people. What makes Raina no longer an exalted presence is what makes her, to Bluntschli, a real person, capable of love as she is capable of error.

**Summary: Nicola’s conversation with Louka to end of play**

Nicola notes that Louka’s sleeve is down, but she does not admit that the sleeve is covering the bruise on her wrist that Sergius gave her. Nicola brags that Sergius has given him money for no other reason than to demonstrate Sergius’ wealth. Bluntschli, too, has given Nicola money for “supporting the lies” told to protect Bluntschli’s truth from Sergius and Petkoff. Nicola tells Louka that, if she were more willing to behave obediently for men like Sergius, she might one day marry a noble. He says this not knowing that Louka and Sergius are already flirting. Before Nicola leaves, and as Sergius arrives, Nicola states that although Nicola and Louka are engaged, Nicola would help her to become a lady if she could arrange it. He is so devoted as a servant that he would put her interests above his own.

Sergius, alone with Louka, talks about how his confidence initially faltered in battle, but he quickly gained an overmastering courage. Louka says that if she were Empress of Russia, she would marry the man whom she loves without a care for public image. Sergius pledges that Louka will be his and that he has a hold on her. Louka, testing his influence, reiterates that another man loves Raina, and that Raina is open to this man’s affections. When Sergius presses her, she tells him that the man is Bluntschli. Upon this knowledge, Sergius states that Louka is still the object of Sergius’ affection, but that he will challenge Bluntschli to a duel. He says that Bluntschli has disrespected Sergius’s honor by setting his sights on Raina. Sergius quickly finds Bluntschli and challenges him to the duel. Bluntschli says he does not take the charge lightly and says he will fight if he has to. Raina enters. As she is on the verge of admitting to Sergius that she loves Bluntschli, Bluntschli argues that Raina only took him in because he threatened her with a gun. He also notes that the friend to whom he told the story of being helped by Raina and Catherine was brutally killed by the Bulgarians. Sergius and Raina find this knowledge horrible, and Sergius compares it to the “horror” of love. At this, Raina snaps that she has seen Sergius with Louka together, and Sergius seems tacitly to admit that he has been courting Louka. He has not been aware, until Raina tells him, that Louka is engaged to Nicola. Sergius is greatly agitated to hear this news. When Bluntschli coolly tells him to calm down, Sergius becomes doubly angry, figuring that Bluntschli thinks he is a “cultivated” Swiss telling a “barbarian” Bulgarian to be reasonable. Sergius asks Bluntschli to render judgment on Louka, who Sergius believes knows everything about the family and has been eavesdropping so as to gain information on the Petkoffs and use it for blackmail. But Bluntschli says he can judge no one for this because he’s also eavesdropped in his military days. He says that people will do what they will do to survive and gain an advantage over others. Petkoff enters, telling Raina and the rest assembled that he thinks someone has been wearing his coat and has stretched it out. Raina removes her picture from the coat pocket secretly. Petkoff reaches for the picture of Raina the he had just discovered in his coat just before. When he finds it missing, he inquires about it to Raina and Sergius. Bluntschli finally admits that the picture was meant for him. Raina’s earlier lie about the nature of the chocolate creams, which she blamed on Nicola, is also revealed. Bluntschli tells Petkoff that Bluntschli is the man in the story about the soldier being helped by the Bulgarian women that Sergius and Petkoff heard during the war. Nicola enters and reveals that he no longer wishes to be engaged to Louka, and that she deserves to be married to a wealthier nobleman. Catherine enters as the scene is in progress. After Nicola releases Louka, Sergius apologizes to her, acknowledging their flirtation. Bluntschli says he will take on Nicola as the head of some of the hotels he has recently inherited, again hinting at his wealth. Louka says that Sergius’s touch makes them formally engaged, and Sergius, pleased, accepts this. Catherine and Petkoff are confused and dismayed, and Bluntschli reveals that he has long harbored a crush on Raina and that he has a hopelessly romantic temperament. But Bluntschli says he cannot make a formal offer of marriage to Raina because he is middle-aged and she is too young at only seventeen. At this, Raina cries that she is really twenty-three, and Bluntschli immediately proposes marriage to her. Petkoff and Catherine, judging the reversals that have taken place to be in their favor, agree, on the condition that Bluntschli can supply the kind of life to which Raina is accustomed. But when Petkoff and Catherine realize that Bluntschli has much more money than they do, including more horses and more property, they agree gaily to the marriage. As the play ends, Bluntschli leaves to handle his father’s estate, and promises to return to marry Raina. He also asks Sergius to wait to marry Louka until his return so they can all celebrate together. Sergius has the last words of the play, exclaiming, “What a man! What a man!”

**Analysis**

Here, the plot of the drama unravels fully, leaving characters to account not only for what they’ve done throughout the play, but the lies they’ve told in order to justify their actions. Catherine, Raina, and Bluntschli must admit that they’ve lied about Bluntschli’s previous presence in the house, and that Bluntschli, too, misled Petkoff and Sergius earlier in not admitting to his prior acquaintance with the family. Raina must come clean as to her prior friendship with Bluntschli, and even more so with the romantic portion of that relationship. And, of course, Catherine must admit that she has lied to her husband about an intruder in their very own house, and an enemy of the Bulgarian people at that.

These revelations are, in some sense far, far less than what Sergius and Louka have to admit. Namely, that they have been carrying on a secret flirty relationship, and Sergius’ clear instigation of this while he was engaged to Raina. This, and not Raina’s love for Bluntschli, is the primary infidelity of the play. Sergius’s flirtation with Louka is direct and indiscreet, whereas Raina’s love for Bluntschli has only manifested in a picture that Bluntschli does not even know about. Louka has made plain, from the beginning of the play, that she has long desired to end up with a man above her own social rank. For Louka, Nicola is a pawn rather than a fiancé, and Sergius, though in many ways loathsome, represents a path out of poverty and servitude for her. Notable in this part of Act Three is the speed with which these revelations unfold, and the manner by which characters deal with the information. Petkoff and Catherine are very quick to understand that Bluntschli is a decent man. But it is only when he reveals that he is also extraordinarily wealthy, even more so than the noble Bulgarian Petkoffs, that they acknowledge he is a good match for. This reveals the true values of the Petkoff family, and of nobility more broadly, which was quick to sacrifice its high social standing whenever a large amount of money was involved. This all points to one of the underlying conclusions of the play: that people’s moral codes are not so much fixed as situational, that people must make their decisions based on the information available to them, and whatever comes from those decisions is therefore optimal under the circumstances. The idea that everyone must behave according to the hand of cards he or she is dealt is the advice Bluntschli gives to Raina at the beginning of the play. It is certainly “bad” of him to threaten Raina at gunpoint if she calls out and reveals him, and it is “good” of him to be nice to her, and to sleep peacefully on her bed. But Bluntschli is really neither “good” nor “bad” in that scene, or in the rest of the play. He is someone who takes in information and does what he can with it to stay alive. If this is self-preservation, it is of a courteous and transparent kind. It might not always inspire devotion, but it does eventually in Raina, who is accustomed to various performances of pride and self-importance, mostly by Sergius, that she realizes are without merit.

Bluntschli, perhaps unintentionally, teaches the Petkoffs and those around them to behave with a degree of moderation, restraint, and shifting ethics that might be combined into a philosophy called “pragmatism” or “rationalism.” What that really means, for Bluntschli, is that the world presents a set of decisions to be made, and that the man best suited to come out on top in such a world is the man who acknowledges that many of those decisions will have bad and worse, rather than good and bad, outcomes. One cannot rant and rail against such a world. One can only do well to accept it, and to move forward without regretting decisions when they come. This all makes Sergius’s exclamation at the end of the play so poignant, and a fitting summary of the events that passed. Bluntschli is an estimable man precisely because he is the man that, in the beginning of the play, no one seemed very eager to imitate. He was not invested in projecting confidence, heroism, or pride. But it was a sense of collectedness that allowed Bluntschli to survive his first night with Raina, to escape, to return to the Petkoff house ostensibly to return his coat, and finally to win over Raina, for whom he expresses love only after realizing that she very well can be won, and wed, after all.