**Summary: Beginning of Act Two to Sergius’s first interaction with Louka**

The stage notes say that it is now March of 1886. The setting is still the Petkoffs’ house in rural Bulgaria, but the action now takes place in an adjacent garden. Nicola, the male servant of the home, converses with Louka. Louka complains about her mistresses, Catherine and Raina, and Nicola scolds her for it. As he does it, he reveals that he and Louka are engaged. Nicola argues that he could never marry someone who didn’t behave according to the rules of good service. Louka says she doesn’t have the soul of a servant like Nicola does. Louka also says she knows many of the Petkoffs’ secrets, and could use them against the family. Nicola counters that he also knows many secrets, but warns her that it is a servant’s job never to betray these secrets to anyone. Nicola reveals to the audience that he one day hopes to purchase his freedom and open a shop in Sofia, the capital, at which Louka can work. Nicola and Louka hear a man’s voice outside the gate. The family’s patriarch, Major Paul Petkoff, has returned from the war. The household scurries about to receive him. Nicola and Louka provide coffee, alcohol, and cigarettes. Catherine greets her husband excitedly but modestly. She is surprised and offended when Petkoff reveals that the Bulgarians and Russians have brokered a peace with the Serbians, instead of simply vanquishing them without conditions. In response, Petkoff says that it would have been nearly impossible to achieve total victory. Catherine tells her husband that, in his absence, they have installed an electric bell for the servants in the house, so no one needs to impolitely shout for help. Catherine finds the bell more civilized, but Petkoff thinks it unnecessary. They hear Sergius arriving, and before he enters the scene, Petkoff tells Catherine she’ll need to get Sergius off Petkoff’s back. Sergius is angling for a promotion that Petkoff fears will never come, because Sergius has no tactical military skill or intelligence. Sergius enters, and the stage directions describe him as the true image of his picture that Raina keeps in her bedroom. The directions say he looks like a genuine soldierly hero, but is cynical, moody, and thinks the world is unworthy of his ideals. Sergius announces, however, that he has resigned his commission in the Bulgarian army because he can no longer tolerate the cowardice of those in command. He repeats that although his cavalry charge was successful, the officers believed it was foolish and out of line with military etiquette. Petkoff tries to remain neutral in this, acknowledging that Sergius has been sorely treated but that being a soldier is a trade. Raina enters, greeting her father and Sergius excitedly but modestly.

Petkoff and Sergius reminisce about a soldier they met in battle near Peerot, who tricked them into trading two hundred worn-out horses for fifty strong men. This soldier was a Swiss hired by the Serbians. This immediately strikes Raina’s and Catherine’s interest, although they try not to let on that they are thinking of Bluntschli. Sergius and Petkoff tell a story they heard about this Swiss soldier being hidden by two Bulgarian women during his retreat. Catherine and Raina’s fear is confirmed, that this man is the “chocolate cream soldier” they helped, and the women in the story are themselves. Sergius says the soldier escaped the master of the house’s cloak.

Raina and Catherine try to pass of their dismay by scolding Petkoff and Sergius for telling an unseemly story. Sergius apologizes theatrically but Petkoff argues that women married to soldiers should be up to handling rough words. Catherine and Petkoff leave, and Sergius and Raina are alone for the first time in the play. Raina says that she could never remain mad at Sergius, and that she loves him. Sergius says the same to Raina, and she leaves the scene briefly, at which point Sergius turns his attentions to Louka and begins flirting with her.

**Analysis**

This section of the play introduces the servants’ intrigue, and important feature of nineteenth- and twentieth-century drama and fiction. The actions of servants usually serve to reflect the actions of the main characters, their employers. Often in these narratives, the servants’ actions disrupt and interfere with the plot. Here, Nicola indicates that Louka has aspirations “above her station,” that she does not always want to be a servant. He does not argue when Louka tells him that he, on the other hand, will be a servant forever, that he will always do exactly what the master and mistress want at all times. The inclusion of Louka and Nicola’s contrasting aspirations in this dialogue foreshadows events to come. Louka has no qualms about using information she gleans about each family member to her advantage. This is evident early on when Raina is hiding the soldier in her room and Louka senses that Raina is not being absolutely truthful. Louka has proven to be likely untrustworthy, but also cunning. Raina and Catherine have silently agreed to keep up their ruse about the nature of Bluntschli, the Swiss mercenary they aided. When they hear Sergius and Petkoff tell the story, which the two men have learned second-hand from Bluntschli's friend, they pretend to find it scandalous and shocking. Sergius’s apology to Raina for telling the unseemly story is convincing, but is an exaggerated performance. The manner of his apology, coupled with the stage direction note of his disillusioned moodiness, is telling of how his future actions toward Raina will be. Petkoff, in this scene, is revealed to be a somewhat self-serious and not terribly insightful mind. Catherine runs the home and colludes with Raina, and the two women have helped to make improvements to the property in Petkoff’s absence. Petkoff admits that the Bulgarians had reach a peace agreement, despite winning the illustrious battle of won by Sergius, because the combined forces of the Serbs and Austrians are simply too much for Bulgaria to bear. Raina and Catherine are disappointed by this. They want war to be a clean divide between heroism and deceit, and Petkoff’s truce clouds what they understood before to be a single shining example of Sergius’ heroism. This is a further disillusionment for Raina, who has already been disabused of some of her thoughts about idyllic soldierly life from her interactions with Bluntschli. There is perhaps another striking feature in this part of the drama, which is the presence of chance, or coincidence. The story that Petkoff and Sergius happen to have heard the story about the retreating soldier in fact took place in their very house. This coincidence, and the coincidences that will occur later on, might seem to strain the realism of the play. However, they intentionally make a serious matter about war funny, if not absurd, to the audience. The coincidences can also be seen as narrative shortcuts, or methods for cutting down the exposition of the play. Tensions between and within characters are exposed: Raina is forced to choose between honesty and cunning, and Bluntschli’s self-awareness is a tonic for Sergius’s pompous and clueless behavior.

**Summary: Sergius’s interaction with Louka to end of Act Two**

Now alone, Sergius begins to flirt with Louka. He comes on to her brusquely, and wonders at his own boldness, referring to himself as a hero. Sergius admits that though he loves Raina, his personality will allow him to go behind her with Louka. Louka cautions that they should move to where they can’t be seen. Sergius also bristles at Louka’s mention of Raina, and says that he cannot talk about his engagement with a servant, thus toggling between wooer and haughty noble. Louka, angry, tells him that Raina will never marry him because Raina is in love with another man. Sergius demands to know who that man is, but Louka says she will never tell. Sergius insults her, calls her a sneak and a bad servant, and grabs her so hard on the wrist that he bruises her. Sergius regrets that he’s harmed Louka and asks for her forgiveness right away, but Louka says that such apologies are of no use to servants, who must do what nobles say. Raina enters, breaking up their conversation, and asks, jokingly, if Sergius and Louka have been flirting. This flusters Sergius, and Raina apologizes for what she considers a harmless joke. Sergius goes to Petkoff’s office to help him with plans for troop movements in the final stages of the war, despite Sergius’s poor command of military strategy. Catherine enters and wonders with Raina at the terrible luck of Sergius and Petkoff meeting the soldier that the two women helped. They wonder what to do, and Catherine worries that if anyone finds out about the soldier’s presence in Raina’s room, Sergius will break off the engagement. Raina replies bitterly that she sometimes feels Catherine wants to marry Sergius more than she does. Raina departs. Louka returns and announces the arrival of a Swiss soldier named Captain Bluntschli. Catherine realizes that it’s the soldier she and Raina helped. Catherine conspires to keep Sergius and Petkoff from finding out about the soldier’s presence. Bluntschli has returned to give back Petkoff’s coat, which Catherine lent him to stay warm and disguise himself when he left the house. Much to Catherine’s dismay, Sergius and Petkoff have already seen Bluntschli from the window and come out to greet him happily, as they have already met him during the war. Raina enters, sees Bluntschli, and, in a moment of shock, says aloud “the chocolate cream soldier.” This quietly amuses Bluntschli and confuses Petkoff and Sergius, who assume Raina and Catherine have never met Bluntschli. Raina clears the confusion by lying that Nicola has destroyed a soldier ornament she has constructed to place on a chocolate dessert dish. Nicola returns with Bluntschli’s bag in which Petkoff’s coat is concealed. Catherine freezes, as she realizes that if Petkoff and Sergius were to see this exchange, they would know something is amiss. Petkoff asks Bluntschli to stay with them, as he is happy to have Bluntschli among them and senses nothing of the drama. Bluntschli smiles to himself and agrees, much to the despair of Catherine.

**Analysis**

Sergius’s behavior in this section swiftly changes direction. Not only does he flirt with Louka, he throws caution to the wind and does it with his fiancé in the next room. Although Louka entertains Sergius’s affections, she is shocked at his boldness. She is not entirely satisfied with the explanation that Sergius has many kinds of personalities in him that allow him to behave according to the circumstances. Sergius’s behavior here sheds more light on his performance during the calvary charge, as, in that instance, his only hope was to make it seem that he was brave. It also sheds light on his performance of an apology to Raina in just before she exits the room.

Of note are the instances in which male characters exert themselves over female characters. Sergius hurting Louka’s arm might raise an eyebrow among readers and audience members. So too would Bluntschli’s threat of physical harm to Raina in the first act. The master of the house, Petkoff, and their servant, Nicola, both chide their female counterparts: Petkoff dismisses Catherine’s improvements to the home while he was away, and Nicola puts down Louka by telling her she does not have the soul of a servant. The persistence of male threats and criticisms to female characters is striking to readers now, and would have been striking at the time of the play’s first performance. It brings attention to how interactions between men and women were the same no matter their social standing. The timing of Bluntschli’s arrival is the single greatest coincidence of the play. But it also sets up the drama that will eventually spill over in the final act. Bluntschli is largely unperturbed by what Catherine and Raina see as a fiasco. He is not an excitable character, although he does alternate between moments of fear, self-pity, and calm during his initial interaction with Raina in her bedroom. But, largely, Bluntschli’s feelings are muted compared to the feelings of those around him, and he tends to excite emotions in others without necessarily experiencing them himself. The contrast between Bluntschli’s calm demeanor and the frenzy of the other characters becomes starker as the play progresses. He may not be the classic idea of noble and heroic, but Bluntschli’s ability to smoothly navigate through difficult situations and keep his wits about him make both Raina and the audience begin to fall for him. Raina’s behavior on seeing Bluntschli in her house again is especially striking. She cannot keep herself from remarking that he is “the chocolate cream soldier.” She does this because she is so surprised to see him again, but she is clearly flustered, which signals that she could be falling for him. For Raina, Sergius, and Petkoff, the mess of war disrupted their normal life. Battles occur outside the house. Bluntschli’s initial intrusion into the bedroom, as a solider on the lam, quite literally brought war into the home. Raina has to face the unromantic facts of war delivered by Bluntschli, but his presence also introduces the prospect of another romantic interest into Raina’s life. Seeing Bluntschli again brings back that initial shock, and makes plain that, although the war is finished in the fields, the romantic complexities hinged on that war are not yet over.