

ARMS AND THE MAN

George Bernard Shaw

- CATHERINE: [entering hastily, full of good news]
Raina! [She pronounces it Rah-eena, with the stress on the ee] Raina!
(She goes to the bed, expecting to find RAINA *there*)
Why,
where -?
[RAINA looks into the room]
Heavens, child! are you out in the night air instead of in your bed? You'll catch your death. Louka told me you were asleep.
- RAINA: [dreamily] I sent her away. I wanted to be alone. The stars are so beautiful! What is the matter?
- CATHERINE: Such news! There has been a battle.
- RAINA: [her eyes dilating] Ah! [She comes eagerly to CATHERINE]
- CATHERINE : A great battle at Slivnitza! A victory! And it was won by Sergius.
- RAINA: [with a cry of delight]
Ah! [They embrace rapturously] Oh, mother! [Then, with sudden anxiety] Is father safe?
- CATHERINE: Of course: he sends me the news. Sergius is the hero of the hour, the idol of the regiment.
- RAINA: Tell me, tell me. How was it! [Ecstatically] Oh, mother! mother! mother! [She pulls her mother down on the ottoman; and they kiss one another frantically]
- CATHERINE: [with surging enthusiasm] You cant guess how splendid it is. A cavalry charge! think of that! He defied our Russian commanders - acted without orders - led a charge on his own responsibility - headed it himself - was the first man to sweep through their guns. Cant you see it, Raina: our gallant splendid Bulgarians with their swords and eyes flashing, thundering down like an avalanche and scattering the wretched Serbs and their dandified Austrian officers like chaff. And you! you kept Sergius waiting a year before you would be betrothed to him. Oh, if you have a drop of Bulgarian blood in your veins, you will worship him when he comes back.
- RAINA: What will he care for my poor little worship after the acclamations of a whole army of heroes? But no matter: I am so happy! So proud! [She rises and walks about excitedly] It proves that all our ideas were real after all.
- CATHERINE: [indignantly] Our ideas real! What do you mean?
- RAINA: Our ideas of what Sergius would do. Our patriotism. Our heroic ideals. I sometimes used to doubt whether they were anything but dreams. Oh, what faithless little creatures girls are! When I buckled on Sergius's sword he looked so noble: it was treason to think of disillusion or humiliation or failure. And yet - and yet - [She sits

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down again suddenly] Promise me you'll never tell him.

CATHERINE: Don't ask me for promises until I know what I'm promising.

RAINA: Well, it came into my head just as he was holding me in his arms and looking into my eyes, that perhaps we only had our heroic ideas because we are so fond of reading Byron and Pushkin, and because we were so delighted with the opera that season at Bucharest. Real life is so seldom like that! indeed never, as far as I knew it then. [Remorsefully] Only think, mother: I doubted him: I wondered whether all his heroic qualities and his soldiership might not prove mere imagination when he went into a real battle. I had an uneasy fear that he might cut a poor figure there beside all those clever officers from the Tsar's court.

CATHERINE: A poor figure! Shame on you! The Serbs have Austrian officers who are just as clever as the Russians; but we have beaten them in every battle for all that.

RAINA: [laughing and snuggling against her mother] Yes: I was only a prosaic little coward. Oh, to think that it was all true! that Sergius is just as splendid and noble as he looks! That the world is really a glorious world for women who can see its glory and men who can act its romance! What happiness! what unspeakable fulfilment!

They are interrupted by the entry of LOUKA, a handsome, proud girl in a pretty Bulgarian peasant's dress with double apron, so defiant that her servility to RAINA is almost insolent. She is afraid of CATHERINE, but even with her, goes as far as she dares.

LOUKA: If you please, madam, all the windows are to be closed and the shutters made fast. They say there may be shooting in the streets. [RAINA and CATHERINE rise together, alarmed] The Serbs are being chased right back through the pass; and they say they may run into the town. Our cavalry will be after them; and our people will be ready for them, you may be sure, now they're running away.

[She goes out on the balcony, and pulls the outside shutters to; then steps back into the room]

CATHERINE: [businesslike, her housekeeping instincts aroused] I must see that everything is made safe downstairs.

RAINA: I wish our people were not so cruel. What glory is there in killing wretched fugitives?

CATHERINE: Cruel! Do you suppose they would hesitate to kill you - or worse?

RAINA: [to LOUKA] Leave the shutters so that I can just close them if I hear any noise.

CATHERINE: [authoritatively, turning on her way to the door] Oh no, dear: you must keep them fastened. You would be sure to drop off to sleep and leave them open. Make them fast, Louka.

LOUKA : Yes, madam. [She fastens them]

RAINA: Don't be anxious about me . The moment I hear a shot, I shall blow out the candles and roll myself up in bed with my ears well covered.

CATHERINE: Quite the wisest thing you can do, my love. Goodnight.

RAINA: Goodnight. [Her emotion comes back for a moment] Wish

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me joy. [They kiss] This is the happiest night of my life - if only there are no fugitives.

CATHERINE: Go to bed, dear; and don't think of them. [She goes out]

LOUKA: [secretly, to RAINA] If you would like the shutters open, just give them a push like this. [She pushes them: they open: she pulls them to again] One of them ought to be bolted at the bottom; but the bolt's gone.

RAINA: [with dignity, reproving her] Thanks, Louka; but we must do what we are told. [LOUKA makes a grimace] Goodnight.

LOUKA: [carelessly] Goodnight. [She goes out, swaggering]

RAINA, left alone, takes off her fur cloak and throws it on the ottoman. Then she goes to the chest of drawers, and adores the portrait there with feelings that are beyond all expression. She does not kiss it or press it to her breast, or shew it any mark of bodily affection; but she takes it in her hands and elevates it, like a priestess.

RAINA: [looking up at the picture] Oh, I shall never be unworthy of you any more, my soul's hero: never, *never, never.* [She replaces it reverently. Then she selects a novel from the little pile of books. She turns over the leaves dreamily; finds her page; turns the book inside out at it; and, with a happy sigh, gets into bed and prepares to read herself to sleep. But before abandoning herself to fiction, she raises her eyes once more, thinking of the blessed reality, and murmurs] My hero! my hero!