

Arms and the Man

*By George Bernard Shaw
Adapted by Ken Womble*

Performance Rights

It is an infringement of the federal copyright law to copy or reproduce this script in any manner or to perform this play without royalty payment. All rights are controlled by Eldridge Publishing Co., Inc. Contact the publisher for additional scripts and further licensing information. The author's name must appear on all programs and advertising with the notice: "Produced by special arrangement with Eldridge Publishing Company."

ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY

© 2023 by Ken Womble

Download your complete script from Eldridge Publishing

<https://histage.com/arms-and-the-man>

STORY OF THE PLAY

Arms and the Man is a satire on the glorification of war, and the folly of basing one's affections on an unreal love. It's perfect for young performers who want to dig into classical work that is challenging, but also very actable. All of the seven characters are full of idealism, energy and humor. And the two older characters, Catherine Petkoff and Major Paul Petkoff, are true comic gems. This adaptation offers a wonderful alternative and addition to Shakespeare. Like many of Shakespeare's plays, *Arms and the Man* has formal and poetic language, rich characters, and impactful stories. The play has been shortened to fly (with laughter and energy!) in performance. Without an intermission the running time should be about one hour and fifteen minutes.

Set in the 1880s during wartime, the first act begins in the bedroom of a young Bulgarian lady, Raina Petkoff. She is thrilled to find out her fiancé, Sergius, has just led a glorious cavalry charge, but is warned enemy soldiers may be running away through her town. Sure enough, one of fleeing soldiers, a war weary Captain Bluntschli, breaks into her room and holds her hostage. Over the course of the evening, he and Raina start to connect. Raina provides him with the last chocolates in an open box, and gives him the nickname, "my chocolate cream soldier." The act ends with the exhausted Bluntschli falling asleep in her bed.

In the second act, the war has ended and Sergius and Raina's father, Major Petkoff, return home. Raina and Sergius rekindle their relationship and its "higher love." Yet, Sergius, sensing the false nature of their relationship, begins to fall in love with Louka, the Petkoff's servant. Captain Bluntschli returns to the Petkoff home to bring back the older man's coat, and is now welcomed as "our friend, the enemy!" In the third act, Bluntschli and Raina get reacquainted. Just as love is beginning to kindle between them, Raina discovers that the photograph she secretly gave Bluntschli is still in her father's coat for him to find. Sergius, feeling badly

Arms and the Man

- 3 -

about the way he treated Louka earlier, is trying to win her back. However, Louka, demanding that he respect her, rejects him. Finally, the four lovers have it out, and the idealistic Raina and Sergius realize their love is a sham. In the play's final scene, the Petkoff parents find out the couples have switched partners and object. The wealthy Sergius offers Raina a prosperous marriage, but Bluntschli doesn't. Bluntschli then reveals he has just inherited a huge estate from his father, so is now wealthy too, satisfying Raina's parents. The play ends happily with Louka and Sergius in each other's arms, and Raina expressing her affection for Bluntschli, her "chocolate cream soldier."

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

A reading of this adaptation of *Arms and the Man* was performed at the University of Northern Colorado's School of Theatre Arts and Dance, on December 9, 2022. It was directed by Ken Womble and the cast was as follows:

RAINA	Malea Kinnison
CATHERINE PETKOFF	Abby Mortimer
LOUKA	Elisabeth Larson
CAPTAIN BLUNTSCHLI	Brian Davis
RUSSIAN OFFICER	Ken Womble
MAJOR PAUL PETKOFF	Andrew Hensel
MAJOR SERGIUS SARANOFF	Henry Hawes

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 3 w)

RAINA: An idealistic and strong-willed young woman, in love with Sergius. 20s.

CATHERINE PETKOFF: Raina's mother; crafty and fiercely protective of Raina. 40s.

LOUKA: The Petkoff's servant, Louka has the soul and will of a princess. 20s.

CAPTAIN BLUNTSCHLI: A career soldier, pragmatic and gifted at his profession. 30s.

RUSSIAN OFFICER: A man on a mission to find a fugitive of war. 20-30s.

MAJOR PAUL PETKOFF: Raina's father; an excitable and unambitious man, except to his importance in local society. 50s.

MAJOR SERGIUS SARANOFF: A high-spirited and idealistic soldier, in love with Raina. 30s.

SCENES

ACT I: Raina's bedchamber in the Petkoff home

ACT II: The garden

ACT III: The library

ACT I

(November 1885. Night. A lady's bedchamber in a small Bulgarian town near the Dragoman Pass. The interior of the room is not like anything to be seen in the eastern countries of Europe. It is half rich Bulgarian, half cheap Viennese. Included in the furnishings is an ottoman, washstand, and chair. The dressing table is covered with a colorful cloth. A chest of drawers has on top a stack of paperback novels, a box of chocolate creams and a large photograph of a handsome military officer. Wooden shutters open to a balcony. AT RISE: RAINA PETKOFF, a young lady, intensely conscious of the romantic beauty of the night, and that her own youth and beauty is a part of it, stands gazing at the snowy Balkans. She wears a lovely dressing gown. Her reverie is interrupted by her mother, CATHERINE, a woman over forty, imperiously energetic, who might have been the wife of a mountain farmer in another life. However, in this one she is determined to be a Viennese lady, and to that end wears fashionable attire on all occasions.)

CATHERINE: *(Entering happily.)* Raina— *(SHE pronounces it Rah-eena, with the stress on the ee.)* Raina— *(Goes to the bed.)* Why, where are— *(As she spots Raina on the balcony.)* 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: *(Coming in.)* 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: Ah!

CATHERINE: A great battle at Slivnitza. A victory! And it was won by Sergius!

RAINA: Oh, Mother! *(Then, with sudden anxiety.)* Is Father safe?

CATHERINE: Of course. He sent me the news. Sergius is the hero of the hour, the idol of the regiment.

RAINA: Tell me, tell me. How was it! Oh, Mother, Mother, Mother!

(RAINA hugs her MOTHER joyfully.)

CATHERINE: You can't guess how splendid it was. A cavalry charge—think of that! He headed the charge himself—was the first man to sweep through their guns. Can't you see it, Raina; our gallant splendid Bulgarians with their swords and eyes flashing, thundering down like an avalanche, and scattering the wretched Serbian dandies like chaff.

RAINA: Oh, I am so happy—so proud! It proves that all our ideas were real after all.

CATHERINE: Our ideas real! What do you mean?

RAINA: Our ideas of what Sergius would do. 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 Russian officers.

CATHERINE: A poor figure! Shame on you!

RAINA: 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! What happiness! What unspeakable fulfillment! Ah! *(SHE flings her arms passionately round her MOTHER.)*

(LOUKA enters. A proud girl in a Bulgarian peasant's dress, she is so defiant that her servility to Raina is almost insolent. However, right now she is excited like the others.)

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. The Serbians are being chased right back through the pass and they say they may run into the town. *(SHE goes to the balcony and closes the shutters, then steps back into the room.)*

CATHERINE: I must see that everything is made safe downstairs. *(Turning on her way to the door.)* You must keep the shutters fastened, dear. You would be sure to drop off to sleep and leave them open.

Arms and the Man

- 7 -

RAINA: Oh, don't be anxious about me, Mother. 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. Good night.

RAINA: Good night. *(THEY kiss each other good night.)* Wish me joy of the happiest night of my life—if only there are no fugitives.

CATHERINE: Go to bed, dear, and don't think of them. *(CATHERINE goes out.)*

LOUKA: *(Secretively, to RAINA.)* If you would like the shutters open, just give them a push like this. *(SHE demonstrates.)* One of them ought to be bolted at the bottom, but the bolt's gone. Good night.

(LOUKA goes out. RAINA goes to the chest of drawers and holds the soldier's photograph up admiringly.)

RAINA: Oh, I shall never be unworthy of you anymore, my hero—never, never, never. *(She replaces the photograph reverently and selects a novel from the little pile of books. And then, with a happy sigh, she gets into bed, and raises her eyes once more, thinking of her beloved.)* My hero!

(SFX: A distant shot breaks the quiet of the night outside, and then two more shots, much nearer. SHE scrambles out of bed, and quickly blows out the candle on the chest of drawers. The room is now in darkness. SFX: The firing breaks out again, closer this time. Suddenly, the shutters are pulled open, and the figure of a MAN (BLUNTSCHLI) is revealed in deep shadow. The shutters close immediately, and the room is dark again. But the silence is now broken by the sound of panting.)

RAINA: Who's there? *(The panting stops.)* Who's there? Who is that?

A MAN'S VOICE: *(In a subdued, but threatening tone.)* Sh—sh! Don't call out or you'll be shot. Be good, and no harm will come to you.

Arms and the Man

- 8 -

RAINA: But who—

A MAN'S VOICE: If you raise your voice my revolver will go off. Strike a match and let me see you.

(Another moment of silence. Then RAINA is heard moving to the dressing table. She lights a candle, and a MAN of about 35 is revealed in a deplorable plight, spattered with mud and blood and snow. He wears the tattered remains of a Serbian artillery officer. Quickly sizing Raina up as best he can—her age, her character, the extent to which she is frightened—he continues, more politely but still determinedly.)

MAN: *(Cont'd.)* Excuse my disturbing you, but you recognize my uniform—Serbian! If I'm caught, I shall be killed. Do you understand that?

RAINA: Yes.

MAN: Well, I don't intend to get killed if I can help it. Do you understand that? *(HE locks the door quickly.)*

RAINA: *(Disdainfully.)* I suppose not. Some soldiers, I know, are afraid of death.

MAN: All of them are, dear lady, believe me. It is our duty to live as long as we can. Now if you raise an alarm—

RAINA: —you will shoot me. How do you know that I am afraid to die?

MAN: Ah, but suppose I don't shoot you, what will happen then? Why, a lot of your cavalry will burst into this pretty room of yours and slaughter me here like a pig. Are you prepared to receive that sort of company in your present undress?

(RAINA, suddenly conscious of her nightgown, gathers it more closely to her.)

MAN: *(Cont'd.)* Hardly presentable, eh?

(SHE turns to the dressing table. HE raises his pistol instantly.)

MAN: *(Cont'd.)* Stop! Where are you going?

Arms and the Man

- 9 -

RAINA: *(With dignified patience.)* Only to get my cloak.

MAN: *(Rushing to the dressing table and snatching the cloak.)* A good idea. No, I'll keep the cloak. And you will take care that nobody comes in and sees you without it. This is a better weapon than the revolver, eh?

RAINA: It is not the weapon of a gentleman.

MAN: It's good enough for a man with only you to stand between him and death.

(As THEY stare at one another, they are startled by SFX: several rifle shots from the street, then the sound of steps outside Raina's door. Someone tries the door, and then knocks urgently. The man throws up his head with the gesture of one who sees that all is lost. Now dropping his intimidating manner, he flings the cloak to her.)

MAN: *(Cont'd.)* No use. I'm done for. Quick! Wrap yourself up, they're coming!

RAINA: *(Catching the cloak.)* Oh—thank you.

(SHE wraps herself up with great relief. HE draws his sabre and turns to the door, waiting.)

MAN: Don't mention it.

LOUKA: *(Outside, knocking.)* My lady, my lady! Get up, quick, and open the door.

RAINA: What will you do?

MAN: Never mind. Keep out of the way. It will not last long.

RAINA: I'll help you. I'll save you.

MAN: You can't.

RAINA: I can. I'll hide you. *(SHE pulls HIM towards the window.)* Here! Behind the curtains.

MAN: *(HE hides behind the curtain, looking out for a moment to say.)* If they find me, I promise you a fight—a devil of a fight!

(HE disappears. RAINA takes off the cloak and throws it across the foot of the bed. Then with a sleepy, disturbed air, she opens the door. LOUKA enters excitedly.)

Arms and the Man
- 10 -

LOUKA: A man has been seen climbing up the waterpipe to your balcony—a Serbian. The soldiers want to search for him.

RAINA: *(As if annoyed at being disturbed.)* They shall not search here. Why have they been let in?

(CATHERINE bursts into the room.)

CATHERINE: Raina, darling, are you safe? Have you seen anyone or heard anything?

RAINA: I heard the shooting. Surely the soldiers will not dare come in here?

CATHERINE: I have found a Russian officer, thank Heaven. He knows Sergius. *(Speaking to someone outside.)* Sir, will you come in now! My daughter is ready.

(A young RUSSIAN OFFICER enters.)

OFFICER: Good evening, gracious lady. I am sorry to intrude, but there is a fugitive hiding on the balcony. Will you and the gracious lady your mother please withdraw while we search?

RAINA: Nonsense, sir, you can see that there is no one on the balcony.

(SHE throws the shutters wide open and stands with her back to the curtain where the man is hidden, pointing to the moonlit balcony. SFX: Shots are heard under the window. Raina gasps, but stands her ground, while CATHERINE screams, and the OFFICER rushes to the balcony.)

OFFICER: *(Shouting down to the street.)* Cease firing, you fools! Do you hear? Cease firing! *(HE glares down for a moment; then turns to RAINA, trying to resume his polite manner.)* Could anyone have gotten in without your knowledge? Were you asleep?

RAINA: No, I have not been to bed.

Arms and the Man
- 11 -

OFFICER: *(Coming back into the room.)* Your neighbors have their heads so full of runaway Serbians that they see them everywhere. Gracious lady, a thousand pardons. Good night.

(HE bows graciously, which RAINA returns. The officer exits, followed by CATHERINE. Raina closes the shutters, then turns and addresses LOUKA, who has been watching the scene with curiosity.)

RAINA: Don't leave my mother, Louka, until the soldiers leave.

(LOUKA glances at RAINA, then at the curtain. She laughs to herself and goes out. The MAN immediately steps out from behind the curtain, sheathing his sabre, and dismissing the danger from his mind in a businesslike way.)

MAN: A narrow shave, but a miss is as good as a mile. Dear young lady, your servant until death. I wish for your sake I had joined the Bulgarian army instead of the other. I am not a native Serbian.

RAINA: No, you are one of the Austrians who set the Serbians on to rob us of our national liberty. We hate them!

MAN: Austrian! Not I. Don't hate me, dear young lady. I am only a Swiss, fighting merely as a professional soldier. I joined Serbia because it was nearest to me. Be generous. You've beaten us hollow.

RAINA: Have I not been generous?

MAN: Noble! Heroic! But I'm not saved yet. This particular rush will soon pass through, but the pursuit will go on all night by fits and starts. I must take my chance to get off during a quiet interval. You don't mind my waiting just a minute or two, do you?

RAINA: Oh, no. I am sorry you will have to go into danger again. Won't you sit— *(As she catches sight of his pistol, she cries out.)* Ahhh!

(The MAN, all nerves, shies like a frightened horse.)

Arms and the Man

- 12 -

MAN: Don't frighten me like that! What is it?

RAINA: Your revolver! It was staring that officer in the face all the time. What an escape!

MAN: Oh, is that all?

RAINA: I am sorry I frightened you. *(SHE picks up the pistol and hands it to HIM.)* Pray take it to protect yourself against me.

MAN: No use, dear young lady. There's nothing in it, it's not loaded. *(HE drops it disparagingly into his revolver case.)*

RAINA: Load it by all means.

MAN: I've no ammunition. What use are cartridges in battle? I always carry chocolate instead, and I finished the last cake of that yesterday.

RAINA: Chocolate! Do you stuff your pockets with sweets—like a schoolboy—even in the field?

MAN: Yes. Isn't it contemptible?

(RAINA stares at HIM, unable to utter her feelings. Then, somewhat reluctantly, goes to the chest of drawers and returns with the box of chocolates.)

RAINA: Allow me. I am sorry I have eaten them all except these. *(SHE offers him the box.)*

MAN: *(Ravenously.)* You're an angel! *(HE gobbles the chocolates.)* Creams! Delicious! *(Looks anxiously to see whether there are any more. There are none.)* Bless you, dear lady. You can always tell an old soldier by the inside of his holsters and cartridges. The young ones carry revolvers and cartridges, the old ones, grub. Thank you. *(Hands back the box. SHE snatches it contemptuously from him and throws it away. This impatient action is so sudden that he shies again.)* Ugh! Don't do things so suddenly, gracious lady. Don't revenge yourself because I frightened you just now.

RAINA: Frighten me! Do you know, sir, that though I am not a soldier like you, I think I am at heart as brave as you.

MAN: I should think so. You haven't been under fire for three days, as I have. I'm as nervous as a mouse.

Arms and the Man

- 13 -

RAINA: I'm sorry. I won't scold you. You must excuse me. Our soldiers are not like that.

MAN: Oh, yes, they are. Why, how is it that you've just beaten us? Sheer ignorance of the art of war, nothing else. I never saw anything so unprofessional.

RAINA: Oh, was it unprofessional to beat you?

MAN: Well, tell me: was it professional to throw a regiment of cavalry on a battery of machine guns? I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw it.

RAINA: Did you see the great cavalry charge? Oh, describe it to me!

MAN: Well, it's a funny sight. It's like slinging a handful of peas against a windowpane: first one comes, then two or three close behind him. And then all the rest in a lump.

RAINA: Yes, the first one!—the bravest of the brave!

MAN: Hm. You should see the poor devil pulling at his horse.

RAINA: Why should he pull at his horse?

MAN: It's running away with him, of course. Do you suppose the fellow wants to get there before the others and be killed?

RAINA: Oh! But I don't believe the first man is a coward. I believe he is a hero!

MAN: That's what you'd have said if you'd seen the first man in the charge today.

RAINA: Ah, I knew it! Tell me—tell me about him.

MAN: He did it like an operatic tenor—a regular handsome fellow, with flashing eyes and lovely moustache, shouting a war cry and charging like Don Quixote at the windmills. We did laugh.

RAINA: You dared to laugh!

MAN: Yes. But when the sergeant ran up as white as a sheet, and told us they'd sent us the wrong cartridges, and that we couldn't fire a shot for the next ten minutes, we laughed from the other side of our mouths. And I hadn't even a revolver cartridge—nothing but chocolate. Of course, they just cut us to bits. And there was Don Quixote flourishing like a drum major, thinking he'd done the cleverest thing ever known, whereas he ought to be court-martialed for it.

Arms and the Man

- 14 -

RAINA: Indeed! Would you know him again if you saw him?

MAN: Shall I ever forget him.

(SHE crosses to the chest of drawers for the treasured photograph and brings it to HIM.)

RAINA: That is a photograph of the gentleman—the patriot and hero—to whom I am betrothed.

MAN: *(Looking at it.)* I'm really very sorry. Was it fair to lead me on? *(HE looks again.)* Yes, that's Don Quixote, not a doubt of it. *(Stiffles a laugh.)*

RAINA: Why do you laugh?

MAN: I didn't laugh, I assure you. At least I didn't mean to. But when I think of him charging the windmills and thinking he was doing the finest thing— *(Chokes with suppressed laughter.)*

RAINA: Give me back the portrait, sir.

MAN: Of course. Certainly. I'm really very sorry.

(SHE deliberately kisses it, and looks HIM straight in the face, before returning to the chest of drawers to replace it.)

MAN: *(Cont'd.)* Perhaps I'm quite wrong, you know. No doubt I am. Most likely he had got wind of the cartridge business somehow, and knew it was a safe job.

RAINA: That is to say, he was a pretender and a coward! You did not dare say that before.

MAN: It's no use, dear lady. I can't make you see it from the professional point of view.

RAINA: So much the better for you.

MAN: How?

RAINA: You are my enemy, and you are at my mercy. What would I do if I were a professional soldier?

MAN: Ah, true, dear young lady. You're always right. I know how good you have been to me. To my last hour I shall remember those three chocolate creams. It was unsoldierly, but it was angelic.

Arms and the Man

- 15 -

RAINA: *(Coldly.)* Thank you. And now I *will* do a soldierly thing. You cannot stay here after what you have just said about my future husband. But I will go out on the balcony and see whether it is safe for you to climb down into the street. *(SHE turns to the window.)*

MAN: Down that waterpipe! Stop! Wait! I can't! The very thought of it makes me giddy. I came up it fast enough with death behind me. But to face it now in cold blood!— *(HE sinks on to the ottoman.)* It's no use. I give up. I'm beaten. Give the alarm.

RAINA: *(Disarmed by pity.)* Come, don't be disheartened. Oh, you are a very poor soldier—a chocolate cream soldier. Come, cheer up. It takes less courage to climb down than to face capture. Remember that.

MAN: No, capture only means death, and death is sleep—oh, sleep, sleep, undisturbed sleep. I haven't closed my eyes for thirty-six hours.

RAINA: But what am I to do with you?

MAN: *(Staggering up.)* Of course, I must do something. *(HE shakes himself and speaks with renewed courage.)* You see, sleep or no sleep, you can always do a thing when you know it must be done. Well, that pipe must be got down— *(HE hits himself on the chest and adds.)* Do you hear that, you chocolate cream soldier?

(HE walks boldly toward the balcony, when SFX: there is a terrible burst of firing in the street below.)

RAINA: *(Rushing to HIM.)* Stop! They'll kill you. You want me to save you, don't you?

MAN: I really don't want to be troublesome.

RAINA: Come away from the window—please. *(HE humbly returns further into the room. SHE addresses him patronizingly.)* Now listen. You must trust our hospitality. You do not yet know in whose house you are. I am a Petkoff.

MAN: A what?

End of Freeview

Download your complete script from Eldridge Publishing
<https://histage.com/arms-and-the-man>

Eldridge Publishing, a leading drama play publisher since 1906, offers more than a thousand full-length plays, one-act plays, melodramas, holiday plays, religious plays, children's theatre plays and musicals of all kinds.

For more than a hundred years, our family-owned business has had the privilege of publishing some of the finest playwrights, allowing their work to come alive on stages worldwide.

We look forward to being a part of your next theatrical production.

Eldridge Publishing... for the start of your theatre experience!