

# THE BALD PRIMA DONNA

*by Eugene Ionesco*

MRS MARTIN, MR MARTIN, MRS SMITH, MR SMITH

*[... MR and MRS SMITH come in from the right. They are still wearing the same clothes.]*

**MRS SMITH:** Good evening! How nice to see you! Please forgive us for keeping you waiting so long. We thought we ought to pay you the honours you have a right to expect, and as soon as we learnt that you were going to be kind enough to give us the pleasure of coming to see us, without announcing your intended visit, we hurried to go and put on our glad-rags.

**MR SMITH:** We've had nothing to eat all day. We've been expecting you for four hours. Why have you come so late?

*[MR and MRS SMITH sit down opposite their visitors. Conversation is difficult and words are at first very hard to find. At the beginning a long, embarrassed silence; then later more silences and much hesitation. The clock echoes the various remarks, with more or less violence, as the case demands.]*

**MR SMITH:** Hm!  
*[Silence]*

**MRS SMITH:** Hm! Hm!  
*[Silence]*

**MRS MARTIN:** Hm! Hm! Hm!  
*[Silence]*

**MR MARTIN:** Hm Hm! Hm! Hm!  
*[Silence]*

**MRS MARTIN:** Oh! Really!

*[Silence]*

**MR MARTIN:** I think we must all have colds.

*[Silence]*

**MR SMITH:** It's not cold weather, though.

*[Silence]*

**MRS SMITH:** There are no draughts.

*[Silence]*

**MR MARTIN:** Oh, no! Rather not!

*[Silence]*

**MR SMITH:** Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!

*[Silence]*

**MR MARTIN:** Is there anything wrong?

*[Silence]*

**MRS SMITH:** He can't control himself when he's bored stiff.\*

*[Silence]*

\* (Translator's note: The French is 'Il s'emmerde'. There being no English equivalent to render the two meanings, the translation must be 'strong' or 'weak' according to taste. Unless one drops one of the meanings entirely, the translation is bound to be flabby compared to the French.)

**MRS MARTIN:** Oh really, Sir, you shouldn't at your age.

*[Silence]*

**MR SMITH:** Age doesn't count where the heart's concerned.

*[Silence]*

**MR MARTIN:** Is that true?

*[Silence]*

**MRS SMITH:** That's what they say.

*[Silence]*

**MRS MARTIN:** They say the contrary's true, too.

*[Silence]*

**MR SMITH:** The truth lies between the two.  
*[Silence]*

**MR MARTIN:** That's true, too. *[Silence]*

**MRS SMITH:** *[to the MARTINS]* You two are always travelling around, after all you ought to have some interesting stories to tell us.

**MR MARTIN:** *[to his wife]* Tell them, darling, what you saw today.

**MRS MARTIN:** Oh no, I couldn't. They'd never believe me.

**MR SMITH:** You don't think we'd doubt your word!

**MRS SMITH:** We should be very offended if you thought that.

**MR MARTIN:** *[to his wife]* You'll upset them, darling, if you make them think ...

**MRS MARTIN:** *[graciously]* Well, then! Today I witnessed the most extraordinary incident. It was absolutely incredible.

**MR MARTIN:** Tell them quickly, darling.

**MR SMITH:** Ah! Someone's going to make us laugh!

**MRS SMITH:** At last!

**MRS MARTIN:** Well then, today, as I was going to the market to buy some vegetables, which are still going up and up in price ...

**MRS SMITH:** Yes, where on earth's it going to end!

**MR SMITH:** You mustn't interrupt, my dear.  
Naughty girl!

**MRS MARTIN:** In the street, outside a restaurant, I saw a gentleman, respectably dressed and about fifty years old, perhaps less, who was ...

**MR SMITH:** Who was what?

**MRS SMITH:** Who was what?

**MR SMITH:** *[gallantly to his wife]* Mustn't interrupt, my dear, it's disgraceful of you.

**MRS SMITH:** *[all smiles]* You interrupted first, skunk.

**MR MARTIN:** Ssh! *[To his wife:]* Tell them what the gentleman was doing.

**MRS MARTIN:** Well, I know you'll say that I'm making it up: he was kneeling on the ground and leaning forward.

**MR MARTIN, MR SMITH, MRS SMITH:** Oh!

**MRS MARTIN:** Yes! Leaning forward!

**MR MARTIN, MR SMITH, MRS SMITH:** It can't be true!

**MRS MARTIN:** Yes! Leaning forward he was! I went right up to him to see what he was doing . .

**MR MARTIN, MR SMITH, MRS SMITH:** What? What?

**MRS MARTIN:** His shoe-laces had come undone and he was tying them up!

**MR MARTIN, MR SMITH, MRS SMITH:** Fantastic!

**MR SMITH:** If I'd heard that from anyone else, I'd never have believed it.

**MR MARTIN:** Why not? There are even stranger things than that to be seen about the town. Only today, for example, I was in an Underground train, and there was a gentleman, sitting there as large as life and calmly reading a newspaper.

**MRS SMITH:** What an odd character!

**MR SMITH:** Perhaps it was the same gentleman!  
*[The front door bell rings.]*  
Listen! There's a ring at the door!

**MRS SMITH:** There must be someone there. I'll go and see.  
*[She goes to see, opens and closes the door.]*  
Nobody!  
*[She sits down again.]*

**MR MARTIN:** I'll give you another example ...  
*[The bell rings again.]*

**MR SMITH:** Listen! There's a ring at the door!

**MRS SMITH:** That must be someone. I'll go and see.  
*[She goes to see. She opens and closes the door again.]*  
Nobody!  
*[She comes back to her seat.]*

**MR MARTIN:** *[who has forgotten where he got to]* Er ...

**MRS MARTIN:** You were saying you were going to give us another example.

**MR MARTIN:** Oh, yes ...

*[The bell rings again.]*

**MR SMITH:** Listen! There's a ring at the door!

**MRS SMITH:** I'm not going to open it any more.

**MR SMITH:** Yes, but there must be someone there!

**MRS SMITH:** The first time there was nobody there. Nor the second time either. What makes you think there'll be someone there this time?

**MR SMITH:** Because there's a ring at the door.

**MRS MARTIN:** That's no reason.

**MR SMITH:** What do you mean! When you hear a ring at the bell, it's because there is someone at the door, who rings the bell so that someone else can go and answer it.

**MRS MARTIN:** No, not always. You saw what happened just now!

**MR MARTIN:** Usually there is someone there.

**MR SMITH:** Take myself. when I go to visit someone I ring the bell so that I can get in. I should say everybody does the same thing, and that every time there's a ring at the bell, it's because there is somebody there.

**MRS SMITH:** Oh yes, that's all right in theory. But in practice, things don't turn out that way at all. You saw what just happened!

**MRS MARTIN:** Your wife is perfectly right!

**MR MARTIN:** Oh! You women! Trust you to stick together!

**MRS SMITH:** All right then! I *will* go and look, I won't have you saying I'm pigheaded: but you'll see! There'll be nobody there!

*[She goes to see. She opens and closes the door again.]*

What did I tell you? Nobody! *[She comes back to her seat.]* oh, these men! They're always so sure they're in the right and they're always in the wrong!

*[The bell rings again.]*

**MR SMITH:** Listen! There's a ring at the door! There must be someone there.

**MRS SMITH:** *[losing her temper]* Don't go sending me to answer the door again. You've just seen it's not a bit of use. I've learnt from experience that when you hear a ring at the door, it means that there's never anybody there.

**MRS MARTIN:** Never.

**MR MARTIN:** I'm not sure if that's quite true.

**MR SMITH:** I'm quite sure it isn't. When you hear a ring at the door, it generally means that there's somebody there.

**MRS SMITH:** He never likes to admit he's wrong.

**MRS MARTIN:** My husband's just as obstinate.

**MR SMITH:** Somebody there.

**MR MARTIN:** It's not impossible.

**MRS SMITH:** *[to her husband]* There isn't.

**MR SMITH:** There is.

**MRS SMITH:** I tell you there isn't. Anyway, I'm not budging again for nothing! If you want to find out, go and look for yourself!

**MR SMITH:** I jolly well shall go! And you'll see; there'll be somebody there.

**MRS SMITH** *shrugs her shoulders.*

**MRS MARTIN** *shakes her head.*

**MIR SMITH** *[goes to the door. He throws a glance at his wife and the MARTINS, who are all taken aback:]* It's the Captain of the Fire Brigade.

*[Enter the FIRE-CHIEF.]*