# Mari D'elle

## Anton Chekhov

IT was a free night. Natalya Andreyevna Bronin (her married name was Nikitin), the opera singer, is lying in her bedroom, her whole being abandoned to repose. She lies, deliciously drowsy, thinking of her little daughter who lives somewhere far away with her grandmother or aunt. . . . The child is more precious to her than the public, bouquets, notices in the papers, adorers . . . and she would be glad to think about her till morning. She is happy, at peace, and all she longs for is not to be prevented from lying undisturbed, dozing and dreaming of her little girl.

All at once the singer starts, and opens her eyes wide: there is a harsh abrupt ring in the entry. Before ten seconds have passed the bell tinkles a second time and a third time. The door is opened noisily and some one walks into the entry stamping his feet like a horse, snorting and puffing with the cold.

"Damn it all, nowhere to hang one's coat!" the singer hears a husky bass voice. "Celebrated singer, look at that! Makes five thousand a year, and can't get a decent hat-stand!"

"My husband!" thinks the singer, frowning. "And I believe he has brought one of his friends to stay the night too. . . . Hateful!"

No more peace. When the loud noise of some one blowing his nose and putting off his goloshes dies away, the singer hears cautious footsteps in her bedroom. . . . It is her husband, mari d'elle, Denis Petrovitch Nikitin. He brings a whiff of cold air and a smell of brandy. For a long while he walks about the bedroom, breathing heavily, and, stumbling against the chairs in the dark, seems to be looking for something. . . .

"What do you want?" his wife moans, when she is sick of his fussing about. "You have woken me."

"I am looking for the matches, my love. You . . . you are not asleep then? I have brought you a message. . . . Greetings from that . . . what's-his-name? . . . red-headed fellow who is always sending you bouquets. . . . Zagvozdkin. . . . I have just been to see him."

"What did you go to him for?"

"Oh, nothing particular. . . . We sat and talked and had a drink. Say what you like, Nathalie, I dislike that individual -- I dislike him awfully! He is a rare blockhead. He is a wealthy man, a capitalist; he has six hundred thousand, and you would never guess it. Money is no more use to him than a radish to a dog. He does not eat it himself nor give it to others. Money ought to circulate, but he keeps tight hold of it, is afraid to part with it. . . . What's the good of capital lying idle? Capital lying idle is no better than grass."

Mari d'elle gropes his way to the edge of the bed and, puffing, sits down at his wife's feet.

"Capital lying idle is pernicious," he goes on. "Why has business gone downhill in Russia?

Because there is so much capital lying idle among us; they are afraid to invest it. It's very different in England. . . . There are no such queer fish as Zagvozdkin in England, my girl. . . . There every farthing is in circulation. . . . Yes. . . . They don't keep it locked up in chests there. . . ."

"Well, that's all right. I am sleepy."

"Directly. . . . Whatever was it I was talking about? Yes. . . . In these hard times hanging is too good for Zagvozdkin. . . . He is a fool and a scoundrel. . . . No better than a fool. If I asked him for a loan without security -- why, a child could see that he runs no risk whatever. He doesn't understand, the ass! For ten thousand he would have got a hundred. In a year he would have another hundred thousand. I asked, I talked . . . but he wouldn't give it me, the blockhead."

"I hope you did not ask him for a loan in my name."

"H'm. . . . A queer question. . . ." Mari d'elle is offended. "Anyway he would sooner give me ten thousand than you. You are a woman, and I am a man anyway, a business-like person. And what a scheme I propose to him! Not a bubble, not some chimera, but a sound thing, substantial! If one could hit on a man who would understand, one might get twenty thousand for the idea alone! Even you would understand if I were to tell you about it. Only you . . . don't chatter about it . . . not a word . . . but I fancy I have talked to you about it already. Have I talked to you about sausage-skins?"

"M'm . . . by and by."

"I believe I have. . . . Do you see the point of it? Now the provision shops and the sausage-makers get their sausage-skins locally, and pay a high price for them. Well, but if one were to bring sausage-skins from the Caucasus where they are worth nothing, and where they are thrown away, then . . . where do you suppose the sausage-makers would buy their skins, here in the slaughterhouses or from me? From me, of course! Why, I shall sell them ten times as cheap! Now let us look at it like this: every year in Petersburg and Moscow and in other centres these same skins would be bought to the. . . to the sum of five hundred thousand, let us suppose. That's the minimum. Well, and if. . . ."

"You can tell me to-morrow . . . later on. . . ."

"Yes, that's true. You are sleepy, pardon, I am just going . . . say what you like, but with capital you can do good business everywhere, wherever you go. . . . With capital even out of cigarette ends one may make a million. . . . Take your theatrical business now. Why, for example, did Lentovsky come to grief? It's very simple. He did not go the right way to work from the very first. He had no capital and he went headlong to the dogs. . . . He ought first to have secured his capital, and then to have gone slowly and cautiously. . . . Nowadays, one can easily make money by a theatre, whether it is a private one or a people's one. . . . If one produces the right plays, charges a low price for admission, and hits the public fancy, one may put a hundred thousand in one's pocket the first year. . . . You don't understand, but I am talking sense. . . . You see you are fond of hoarding capital; you are no better than that fool Zagvozdkin, you heap it up and don't know what for. . . . You won't listen, you don't want to. . . . If you were to put it into circulation, you wouldn't have to be rushing all over

the place . . . . You see for a private theatre, five thousand would be enough for a beginning. . . . Not like Lentovsky, of course, but on a modest scale in a small way. I have got a manager already, I have looked at a suitable building. . . . It's only the money I haven't got. . . . If only you understood things you would have parted with your Five per cents . . . your Preference shares. . . ."

"No, merci. . . . You have fleeced me enough already. . . . Let me alone, I have been punished already. . . ."

"If you are going to argue like a woman, then of course . . ." sighs Nikitin, getting up. "Of course. . . ."

"Let me alone. . . . Come, go away and don't keep me awake. . . . I am sick of listening to your nonsense."

"H'm. . . . To be sure . . . of course! Fleeced. . . plundered. . . . What we give we remember, but we don't remember what we take."

"I have never taken anything from you."

"Is that so? But when we weren't a celebrated singer, at whose expense did we live then? And who, allow me to ask, lifted you out of beggary and secured your happiness? Don't you remember that?"

"Come, go to bed. Go along and sleep it off."

"Do you mean to say you think I am drunk? . . . if I am so low in the eyes of such a grand lady. . . I can go away altogether."

"Do. A good thing too."

"I will, too. I have humbled myself enough. And I will go."

"Oh, my God! Oh, do go, then! I shall be delighted!"

"Very well, we shall see."

Nikitin mutters something to himself, and, stumbling over the chairs, goes out of the bedroom. Then sounds reach her from the entry of whispering, the shuffling of goloshes and a door being shut. Mari d'elle has taken offence in earnest and gone out.

"Thank God, he has gone!" thinks the singer. "Now I can sleep."

And as she falls asleep she thinks of her mari d'elle, what sort of a man he is, and how this affliction has come upon her. At one time he used to live at Tchernigov, and had a situation there as a book-keeper. As an ordinary obscure individual and not the mari d'elle, he had been quite endurable: he used to go to his work and take his salary, and all his whims and projects went no further than a new guitar, fashionable trousers, and an amber cigarette-holder. Since he had become "the husband of a celebrity" he was completely transformed.

The singer remembered that when first she told him she was going on the stage he had made a fuss, been indignant, complained to her parents, turned her out of the house. She had been obliged to go on the stage without his permission. Afterwards, when he learned from the papers and from various people that she was earning big sums, he had 'forgiven her,' abandoned book-keeping, and become her hanger-on. The singer was overcome with amazement when she looked at her hanger-on: when and where had he managed to pick up new tastes, polish, and airs and graces? Where had he learned the taste of oysters and of different Burgundies? Who had taught him to dress and do his hair in the fashion and call her 'Nathalie' instead of Natasha?"

"It's strange," thinks the singer. "In old days he used to get his salary and put it away, but now a hundred roubles a day is not enough for him. In old days he was afraid to talk before schoolboys for fear of saying something silly, and now he is overfamiliar even with princes . . . wretched, contemptible little creature!"

But then the singer starts again; again there is the clang of the bell in the entry. The housemaid, scolding and angrily flopping with her slippers, goes to open the door. Again some one comes in and stamps like a horse.

"He has come back!" thinks the singer. "When shall I be left in peace? It's revolting!" She is overcome by fury.

"Wait a bit. . . . I'll teach you to get up these farces! You shall go away. I'll make you go away!"

The singer leaps up and runs barefoot into the little drawing-room where her mari usually sleeps. She comes at the moment when he is undressing, and carefully folding his clothes on a chair.

"You went away!" she says, looking at him with bright eyes full of hatred. "What did you come back for?"

Nikitin remains silent, and merely sniffs.

"You went away! Kindly take yourself off this very minute! This very minute! Do you hear?"

Mari d'elle coughs and, without looking at his wife, takes off his braces.

"If you don't go away, you insolent creature, I shall go," the singer goes on, stamping her bare foot, and looking at him with flashing eyes. "I shall go! Do you hear, insolent . . . worthless wretch, flunkey, out you go!"

"You might have some shame before outsiders," mutters her husband. . . .

The singer looks round and only then sees an unfamiliar countenance that looks like an actor's. . . . The countenance, seeing the singer's uncovered shoulders and bare feet, shows signs of embarrassment, and looks ready to sink through the floor.

"Let me introduce . . ." mutters Nikitin, "Bezbozhnikov, a provincial manager."

The singer utters a shriek, and runs off into her bedroom.

"There, you see . . ." says mari d'elle, as he stretches himself on the sofa, "it was all honey just now . . . my love, my dear, my darling, kisses and embraces . . . but as soon as money is touched upon, then. . . . As you see . . . money is the great thing. . . . Good night!"

A minute later there is a snore.

# Livros Grátis

( http://www.livrosgratis.com.br )

Milhares de Livros para Download:

Baixar livros de Administração
Baixar livros de Agronomia
Baixar livros de Arquitetura
Baixar livros de Artes
Baixar livros de Astronomia
Baixar livros de Biologia Geral
Baixar livros de Ciência da Computação
Baixar livros de Ciência da Informação
Baixar livros de Ciência Política
Baixar livros de Ciências da Saúde
Baixar livros de Comunicação
Baixar livros do Conselho Nacional de Educação - CNE
Baixar livros de Defesa civil
Baixar livros de Direito
Baixar livros de Direitos humanos
Baixar livros de Economia
Baixar livros de Economia Doméstica
Baixar livros de Educação
Baixar livros de Educação - Trânsito
Baixar livros de Educação Física
Baixar livros de Engenharia Aeroespacial
Baixar livros de Farmácia
Baixar livros de Filosofia
Baixar livros de Física
Baixar livros de Geociências
Baixar livros de Geografia
Baixar livros de História
Baixar livros de Línguas