

Swan Song

Anton Checkov

The Project Gutenberg Etext of Swan Song, by Anton Checkov
#2 in our series by Anton Checkhov [Chekov, Tchekhov, Tchekoff]

[If you have trouble searching, you might try using his first and middle names "Anton Pavlovich" with or without a last name. mh]

Copyright laws are changing all over the world, be sure to check the copyright laws for your country before posting these files!!

Please take a look at the important information in this header.
We encourage you to keep this file on your own disk, keeping an electronic path open for the next readers. Do not remove this.

Welcome To The World of Free Plain Vanilla Electronic Texts

Etexts Readable By Both Humans and By Computers, Since 1971

These Etexts Prepared By Hundreds of Volunteers and Donations

Information on contacting Project Gutenberg to get Etexts, and further information is included below. We need your donations.

Swan Song

by Anton Checkov

May, 1999 [Etext #1753]

The Project Gutenberg Etext of Swan Song, by Anton Checkov
*****This file should be named swnsg10.txt or swnsg10.zip*****

Corrected EDITIONS of our etexts get a new NUMBER, swnsg11.txt
VERSIONS based on separate sources get new LETTER, swnsg10a.txt

Project Gutenberg Etexts are usually created from multiple editions, all of which are in the Public Domain in the United States, unless a copyright notice is included. Therefore, we usually do NOT keep any of these books in compliance with any particular paper edition.

We are now trying to release all our books one month in advance of the official release dates, leaving time for better editing.

Please note: neither this list nor its contents are final till

Livros Grátis

<http://www.livrosgratis.com.br>

Milhares de livros grátis para download.

midnight of the last day of the month of any such announcement. The official release date of all Project Gutenberg Etexts is at Midnight, Central Time, of the last day of the stated month. A preliminary version may often be posted for suggestion, comment and editing by those who wish to do so. To be sure you have an up to date first edition [xxxxx10x.xxx] please check file sizes in the first week of the next month. Since our ftp program has a bug in it that scrambles the date [tried to fix and failed] a look at the file size will have to do, but we will try to see a new copy has at least one byte more or less.

Information about Project Gutenberg (one page)

We produce about two million dollars for each hour we work. The time it takes us, a rather conservative estimate, is fifty hours to get any etext selected, entered, proofread, edited, copyright searched and analyzed, the copyright letters written, etc. This projected audience is one hundred million readers. If our value per text is nominally estimated at one dollar then we produce \$2 million dollars per hour this year as we release thirty-six text files per month, or 432 more Etexts in 1999 for a total of 2000+ If these reach just 10% of the computerized population, then the total should reach over 200 billion Etexts given away this year.

The Goal of Project Gutenberg is to Give Away One Trillion Etext Files by December 31, 2001. [10,000 x 100,000,000 = 1 Trillion] This is ten thousand titles each to one hundred million readers, which is only ~5% of the present number of computer users.

At our revised rates of production, we will reach only one-third of that goal by the end of 2001, or about 3,333 Etexts unless we manage to get some real funding; currently our funding is mostly from Michael Hart's salary at Carnegie-Mellon University, and an assortment of sporadic gifts; this salary is only good for a few more years, so we are looking for something to replace it, as we don't want Project Gutenberg to be so dependent on one person.

We need your donations more than ever!

All donations should be made to "Project Gutenberg/CMU": and are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law. (CMU = Carnegie-Mellon University).

For these and other matters, please mail to:

Project Gutenberg
P. O. Box 2782
Champaign, IL 61825

When all other email fails. . .try our Executive Director:
Michael S. Hart <hart@pobox.com>
hart@pobox.com forwards to hart@prairienet.org and archive.org
if your mail bounces from archive.org, I will still see it, if
it bounces from prairienet.org, better resend later on. . . .

We would prefer to send you this information by email.

To access Project Gutenberg etexts, use any Web browser to view <http://promo.net/pg>. This site lists Etexts by author and by title, and includes information about how to get involved with Project Gutenberg. You could also download our past Newsletters, or subscribe here. This is one of our major sites, please email hart@pobox.com, for a more complete list of our various sites.

To go directly to the etext collections, use FTP or any Web browser to visit a Project Gutenberg mirror (mirror sites are available on 7 continents; mirrors are listed at <http://promo.net/pg>).

Mac users, do NOT point and click, typing works better.

Example FTP session:

```
ftp sunsite.unc.edu
login: anonymous
password: your@login
cd pub/docs/books/gutenberg
cd etext90 through etext99
dir [to see files]
get or mget [to get files. . .set bin for zip files]
GET GUTINDEX.?? [to get a year's listing of books, e.g., GUTINDEX.99]
GET GUTINDEX.ALL [to get a listing of ALL books]
```

Information prepared by the Project Gutenberg legal advisor

(Three Pages)

START**THE SMALL PRINT!**FOR PUBLIC DOMAIN ETEXTS**START

Why is this "Small Print!" statement here? You know: lawyers. They tell us you might sue us if there is something wrong with your copy of this etext, even if you got it for free from someone other than us, and even if what's wrong is not our fault. So, among other things, this "Small Print!" statement disclaims most of our liability to you. It also tells you how you can distribute copies of this etext if you want to.

BEFORE! YOU USE OR READ THIS ETEXT

By using or reading any part of this PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm etext, you indicate that you understand, agree to and accept this "Small Print!" statement. If you do not, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for this etext by sending a request within 30 days of receiving it to the person you got it from. If you received this etext on a physical medium (such as a disk), you must return it with your request.

ABOUT PROJECT GUTENBERG-TM ETEXTS

This PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm etext, like most PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm etexts, is a "public domain" work distributed by Professor Michael S. Hart through the Project Gutenberg Association at Carnegie-Mellon University (the "Project"). Among other things, this means that no one owns a United States copyright on or for this work, so the Project (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth below, apply if you wish to copy and distribute this etext under the Project's "PROJECT GUTENBERG" trademark.

To create these etexts, the Project expends considerable efforts to identify, transcribe and proofread public domain works. Despite these efforts, the Project's etexts and any medium they may be on may contain "Defects". Among other things, Defects may take the form of incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other etext medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

LIMITED WARRANTY; DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES

But for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described below, [1] the Project (and any other party you may receive this etext from as a PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm etext) disclaims all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees, and [2] YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE OR UNDER STRICT LIABILITY, OR FOR BREACH OF WARRANTY OR CONTRACT, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES, EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGES.

If you discover a Defect in this etext within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending an explanatory note within that time to the person you received it from. If you received it on a physical medium, you must return it with your note, and such person may choose to alternatively give you a replacement copy. If you received it electronically, such person may choose to alternatively give you a second opportunity to receive it electronically.

THIS ETEXT IS OTHERWISE PROVIDED TO YOU "AS-IS". NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, ARE MADE TO YOU AS TO THE ETEXT OR ANY MEDIUM IT MAY BE ON, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE.

Some states do not allow disclaimers of implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of consequential damages, so the above disclaimers and exclusions may not apply to you, and you may have other legal rights.

INDEMNITY

You will indemnify and hold the Project, its directors, officers, members and agents harmless from all liability, cost and expense, including legal fees, that arise directly or

indirectly from any of the following that you do or cause:
[1] distribution of this etext, [2] alteration, modification,
or addition to the etext, or [3] any Defect.

DISTRIBUTION UNDER "PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm"

You may distribute copies of this etext electronically, or by disk, book or any other medium if you either delete this "Small Print!" and all other references to Project Gutenberg, or:

[1] Only give exact copies of it. Among other things, this requires that you do not remove, alter or modify the etext or this "small print!" statement. You may however, if you wish, distribute this etext in machine readable binary, compressed, mark-up, or proprietary form, including any form resulting from conversion by word processing or hypertext software, but only so long as
EITHER:

[*] The etext, when displayed, is clearly readable, and does *not* contain characters other than those intended by the author of the work, although tilde (~), asterisk (*) and underline (_) characters may be used to convey punctuation intended by the author, and additional characters may be used to indicate hypertext links; OR

[*] The etext may be readily converted by the reader at no expense into plain ASCII, EBCDIC or equivalent form by the program that displays the etext (as is the case, for instance, with most word processors);
OR

[*] You provide, or agree to also provide on request at no additional cost, fee or expense, a copy of the etext in its original plain ASCII form (or in EBCDIC or other equivalent proprietary form).

[2] Honor the etext refund and replacement provisions of this "Small Print!" statement.

[3] Pay a trademark license fee to the Project of 20% of the net profits you derive calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. If you don't derive profits, no royalty is due. Royalties are payable to "Project Gutenberg Association/Carnegie-Mellon University" within the 60 days following each date you prepare (or were legally required to prepare) your annual (or equivalent periodic) tax return.

WHAT IF YOU *WANT* TO SEND MONEY EVEN IF YOU DON'T HAVE TO?

The Project gratefully accepts contributions in money, time, scanning machines, OCR software, public domain etexts, royalty free copyright licenses, and every other sort of contribution you can think of. Money should be paid to "Project Gutenberg Association / Carnegie-Mellon University".

This file contains the chronology, the introduction, Swan Song.

Swan Song

by Anton Checkov

PLAYS BY ANTON TCHEKOFF

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY MARIAN FELL

CONTENTS

Introduction
Chronological List of Works
The Swan Song

INTRODUCTION

ANTON TCHEKOFF

THE last years of the nineteenth century were for Russia tinged with doubt and gloom. The high-tide of vitality that had risen during the Turkish war ebbed in the early eighties, leaving behind it a dead level of apathy which lasted until life was again quickened by the high interests of the Revolution. During these grey years the lonely country and stagnant provincial towns of Russia buried a peasantry which was enslaved by want and toil, and an educated upper class which was enslaved by idleness and tedium. Most of the "Intellectuals," with no outlet for their energies, were content to forget their ennui in vodka and card-playing; only the more idealistic gasped for air in the stifling atmosphere, crying out in despair against life as they saw it, and looking forward with a pathetic hope to happiness for humanity in "two or three hundred years." It is the inevitable tragedy of their existence, and the pitiful humour of their surroundings, that are portrayed with such insight and sympathy by Anton Tchekoff who is, perhaps, of modern writers, the dearest

to the Russian people.

Anton Tchekoff was born in the old Black Sea port of Taganrog on January 17, 1860. His grandfather had been a serf; his father married a merchant's daughter and settled in Taganrog, where, during Anton's boyhood, he carried on a small and unsuccessful trade in provisions. The young Tchekoff was soon impressed into the services of the large, poverty-stricken family, and he spoke regretfully in after years of his hard-worked childhood. But he was obedient and good-natured, and worked cheerfully in his father's shop, closely observing the idlers that assembled there, and gathering the drollest stories, which he would afterward whisper in class to his laughing schoolfellows. Many were the punishments which he incurred by this habit, which was incorrigible.

His grandfather had now become manager of an estate near Taganrog, in the wild steppe country of the Don Cossacks, and here the boy spent his summers, fishing in the river, and roving about the countryside as brown as a gipsy, sowing the seeds of that love for nature which he retained all his life. His evenings he liked best to spend in the kitchen of the master's house among the work people and peasants who gathered there, taking part in their games, and setting them all laughing by his witty and telling observations.

When Tchekoff was about fourteen, his father moved the family to Moscow, leaving Anton in Taganrog, and now, relieved of work in the shop, his progress at school became remarkable. At seventeen he wrote a long tragedy, which was afterward destroyed, and he already showed flashes of the wit that was soon to blaze into genius.

He graduated from the high school at Taganrog with every honour, entered the University of Moscow as a student of medicine, and threw himself headlong into a double life of student and author, in the attempt to help his struggling family.

His first story appeared in a Moscow paper in 1880, and after some difficulty he secured a position connected with several of the smaller periodicals, for which, during his student years, he poured forth a succession of short stories and sketches of Russian life with incredible rapidity. He wrote, he tells us, during every spare minute, in crowded rooms where there was "no light and less air," and never spent more than a day on any one story. He also wrote at this time a very stirring blood-and-thunder play which was suppressed by the censor, and the fate of which is not known.

His audience demanded laughter above all things, and, with his deep sense of the ridiculous, Tchekoff asked nothing better. His stories, though often based on themes profoundly tragic, are penetrated by the light and subtle satire that has won him his reputation as a great humourist. But though there was always a smile on his lips, it was a tender one, and his sympathy with suffering often brought his laughter near to tears.

This delicate and original genius was at first subjected to harsh criticism, which Tchekoff felt keenly, and Trigorin's description in "The Sea-Gull" of the trials of a young author is a cry from Tchekoff's own soul. A passionate enemy of all lies and oppression, he already foreshadows in these early writings the protest against conventions and rules, which he afterward put into Trepleff's reply to Sorin in "The Sea-Gull": "Let us have new forms, or else nothing at all."

In 1884 he took his degree as doctor of medicine, and decided to practise, although his writing had by now taken on a professional character. He always gave his calling a high place, and the doctors in his works are drawn with affection and understanding. If any one spoke slightly of doctors in his presence, he would exclaim: "Stop! You don't know what country doctors do for the people!"

Tchekoff fully realised later the influence which his profession had exercised on his literary work, and sometimes regretted the too vivid insight it gave him, but, on the other hand, he was able to write: "Only a doctor can know what value my knowledge of science has been to me," and "It seems to me that as a doctor I have described the sicknesses of the soul correctly." For instance, Trigorin's analysis in "The Sea-Gull" of the state of mind of an author has well been called "artistic diagnosis."

The young doctor-writer is described at this time as modest and grave, with flashes of brilliant gaiety. A son of the people, there was in his face an expression that recalled the simple-hearted village lad; his eyes were blue, his glance full of intelligence and kindness, and his manners unaffected and simple. He was an untiring worker, and between his patients and his desk he led a life of ceaseless activity. His restless mind was dominated by a passion of energy and he thought continually and vividly. Often, while jesting and talking, he would seem suddenly to plunge into himself, and his look would grow fixed and deep, as if he were contemplating something important and strange. Then he would ask some unexpected question, which showed how far his mind had roamed.

Success was now rapidly overtaking the young author; his first collection of stories appeared in 1887, another one in the same year had immediate success, and both went through many editions; but, at the same time, the shadows that darkened his later works began to creep over his light-hearted humour.

His impressionable mind began to take on the grey tinge of his time, but much of his sadness may also be attributed to his ever-increasing ill health.

Weary and with an obstinate cough, he went south in 1888, took a little cottage on the banks of a little river "abounding in fish and crabs," and surrendered himself to his touching love for nature, happy in his passion for fishing, in the quiet of the country, and in the music and gaiety of the peasants. "One would gladly sell one's soul," he writes, "for the pleasure of seeing the warm evening sky, and the streams and pools reflecting the

darkly mournful sunset." He described visits to his country neighbours and long drives in gay company, during which, he says, "we ate every half hour, and laughed to the verge of colic."

His health, however, did not improve. In 1889 he began to have attacks of heart trouble, and the sensitive artist's nature appears in a remark which he made after one of them. "I walked quickly across the terrace on which the guests were assembled," he said, "with one idea in my mind, how awkward it would be to fall down and die in the presence of strangers."

It was during this transition period of his life, when his youthful spirits were failing him, that the stage, for which he had always felt a fascination, tempted him to write "Ivanoff," and also a dramatic sketch in one act entitled "The Swan Song," though he often declared that he had no ambition to become a dramatist. "The Novel," he wrote, "is a lawful wife, but the Stage is a noisy, flashy, and insolent mistress." He has put his opinion of the stage of his day in the mouth of Treplieff, in "The Sea-Gull," and he often refers to it in his letters as "an evil disease of the towns" and "the gallows on which dramatists are hanged."

He wrote "Ivanoff" at white-heat in two and a half weeks, as a protest against a play he had seen at one of the Moscow theatres. Ivanoff (from Ivan, the commonest of Russian names) was by no means meant to be a hero, but a most ordinary, weak man oppressed by the "immortal commonplaces of life," with his heart and soul aching in the grip of circumstance, one of the many "useless people" of Russia for whose sorrow Tchekoff felt such overwhelming pity. He saw nothing in their lives that could not be explained and pardoned, and he returns to his ill-fated, "useless people" again and again, not to preach any doctrine of pessimism, but simply because he thought that the world was the better for a certain fragile beauty of their natures and their touching faith in the ultimate salvation of humanity.

Both the writing and staging of "Ivanoff" gave Tchekoff great difficulty. The characters all being of almost equal importance, he found it hard to get enough good actors to take the parts, but it finally appeared in Moscow in 1889, a decided failure! The author had touched sharply several sensitive spots of Russian life--for instance, in his warning not to marry a Jewess or a blue-stocking--and the play was also marred by faults of inexperience, which, however, he later corrected. The critics were divided in condemning a certain novelty in it and in praising its freshness and originality. The character of Ivanoff was not understood, and the weakness of the man blinded many to the lifelike portrait. Tchekoff himself was far from pleased with what he called his "literary abortion," and rewrote it before it was produced again in St. Petersburg. Here it was received with the wildest applause, and the morning after its performance the papers burst into unanimous praise. The author was enthusiastically feted, but the burden of his growing fame was beginning to be very irksome to him, and he wrote wearily at this time that he longed to be in the country, fishing in the lake, or lying in the hay.

His next play to appear was a farce entitled "The Boor," which he wrote in a single evening and which had a great success. This was followed by "The Demon," a failure, rewritten ten years later as "Uncle Vanya."

All Russia now combined in urging Tchekoff to write some important work, and this, too, was the writer's dream; but his only long story is "The Steppe," which is, after all, but a series of sketches, exquisitely drawn, and strung together on the slenderest connecting thread. Tchekoff's delicate and elusive descriptive power did not lend itself to painting on a large canvas, and his strange little tragicomedies of Russian life, his "Tedious Tales," as he called them, were always to remain his masterpieces.

In 1890 Tchekoff made a journey to the Island of Saghalien, after which his health definitely failed, and the consumption, with which he had long been threatened, finally declared itself. His illness exiled him to the Crimea, and he spent his last ten years there, making frequent trips to Moscow to superintend the production of his four important plays, written during this period of his life.

"The Sea-Gull" appeared in 1896, and, after a failure in St. Petersburg, won instant success as soon as it was given on the stage of the Artists' Theatre in Moscow. Of all Tchekoff's plays, this one conforms most nearly to our Western conventions, and is therefore most easily appreciated here. In Trigorin the author gives us one of the rare glimpses of his own mind, for Tchekoff seldom put his own personality into the pictures of the life in which he took such immense interest.

In "The Sea-Gull" we see clearly the increase of Tchekoff's power of analysis, which is remarkable in his next play, "The Three Sisters," gloomiest of all his dramas.

"The Three Sisters," produced in 1901, depends, even more than most of Tchekoff's plays, on its interpretation, and it is almost essential to its appreciation that it should be seen rather than read. The atmosphere of gloom with which it is pervaded is a thousand times more intense when it comes to us across the foot-lights. In it Tchekoff probes the depths of human life with so sure a touch, and lights them with an insight so piercing, that the play made a deep impression when it appeared. This was also partly owing to the masterly way in which it was acted at the Artists' Theatre in Moscow. The theme is, as usual, the greyness of provincial life, and the night is lit for his little group of characters by a flash of passion so intense that the darkness which succeeds it seems well-nigh intolerable.

"Uncle Vanya" followed "The Three Sisters," and the poignant truth of the picture, together with the tender beauty of the last scene, touched his audience profoundly, both on the stage and when the play was afterward published.

"The Cherry Orchard" appeared in 1904 and was Tchekoff's last

play. At its production, just before his death, the author was feted as one of Russia's greatest dramatists. Here it is not only country life that Tchekoff shows us, but Russian life and character in general, in which the old order is giving place to the new, and we see the practical, modern spirit invading the vague, aimless existence so dear to the owners of the cherry orchard. A new epoch was beginning, and at its dawn the singer of old, dim Russia was silenced.

In the year that saw the production of "The Cherry Orchard," Tchekoff, the favourite of the Russian people, whom Tolstoi declared to be comparable as a writer of stories only to Maupassant, died suddenly in a little village of the Black Forest, whither he had gone a few weeks before in the hope of recovering his lost health.

Tchekoff, with an art peculiar to himself, in scattered scenes, in haphazard glimpses into the lives of his characters, in seemingly trivial conversations, has succeeded in so concentrating the atmosphere of the Russia of his day that we feel it in every line we read, oppressive as the mists that hang over a lake at dawn, and, like those mists, made visible to us by the light of an approaching day.

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE PRINCIPAL WORKS OF ANTON TCHEKOFF

PLAYS

"The Swan Song" 1889
"The Proposal" 1889
"Ivanoff " 1889
"The Boor" 1890
"The SeaGull" 1896
"The Tragedian in Spite of Himself" 1899
"The Three Sisters" 1901
"Uncle Vanya" 1902
"The Cherry Orchard" 1904

NOVELS AND SHORT STORIES

"Humorous Folk" 1887
"Twilight, and Other Stories" 1887
"Morose Folk" 1890
"Variegated Tales" 1894
"Old Wives of Russia" 1894
"The Duel" 1895
"The Chestnut Tree" 1895
"Ward Number Six" 1897

MISCELLANEOUS SKETCHES

"The Island of Saghalien" 1895
"Peasants" 1898
"Life in the Provinces" 1898
"Children" 1899

The Swan Song

CHARACTERS

VASILI SVIETLOVIDOFF, a comedian, 68 years old

NIKITA IVANITCH, a prompter, an old man

THE SWAN SONG

The scene is laid on the stage of a country theatre, at night, after the play. To the right a row of rough, unpainted doors leading into the dressing-rooms. To the left and in the background the stage is encumbered with all sorts of rubbish. In the middle of the stage is an overturned stool.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. [With a candle in his hand, comes out of a dressing-room and laughs] Well, well, this is funny! Here's a good joke! I fell asleep in my dressing-room when the play was over, and there I was calmly snoring after everybody else had left the theatre. Ah! I'm a foolish old man, a poor old dodderer! I have been drinking again, and so I fell asleep in there, sitting up. That was clever! Good for you, old boy! [Calls] Yegorka! Petrushka! Where the devil are you? Petrushka! The scoundrels must be asleep, and an earthquake wouldn't wake them now! Yegorka! [Picks up the stool, sits down, and puts the candle on the floor] Not a sound! Only echos answer me. I gave Yegorka and Petrushka each a tip to-day, and now they have disappeared without leaving a trace behind them. The rascals have gone off and have probably locked up the theatre. [Turns his head about] I'm drunk! Ugh! The play to-night was for my benefit, and it is disgusting to think how much beer and wine I have poured down my throat in honour of the occasion. Gracious! My body is burning all over, and I feel as if I had twenty tongues in my mouth. It is horrid! Idiotic! This poor old sinner is drunk again, and doesn't even know what he has been celebrating! Ugh! My head is splitting, I am shivering all over, and I feel as dark and cold inside as a cellar! Even if I don't mind ruining my health, I ought at least to remember my age, old idiot that I am! Yes, my old age! It's no use! I can play the fool, and brag, and pretend to be young, but my life is really over now, I kiss my hand to the sixty-eight years that have gone by; I'll never see them again! I have drained the bottle, only a few little drops are left at the bottom, nothing but the dregs. Yes, yes, that's the case, Vasili, old boy. The time has come for you to rehearse the part of a mummy, whether you like it or not. Death is on its way to you. [Stares ahead of him] It is strange, though, that I have been on the stage now for forty-five years, and this is the first time I have seen a theatre at night, after the lights have been put out. The first time. [Walks up to the foot-lights] How dark it is! I can't see a thing. Oh, yes, I can just make out the prompter's box, and his desk; the rest is in pitch darkness, a black, bottomless pit, like a grave, in which death itself might

be hiding.... Brr.... How cold it is! The wind blows out of the empty theatre as though out of a stone flue. What a place for ghosts! The shivers are running up and down my back. [Calls] Yegorka! Petrushka! Where are you both? What on earth makes me think of such gruesome things here? I must give up drinking; I'm an old man, I shan't live much longer. At sixty-eight people go to church and prepare for death, but here I am--heavens! A profane old drunkard in this fool's dress--I'm simply not fit to look at. I must go and change it at once.... This is a dreadful place, I should die of fright sitting here all night. [Goes toward his dressing-room; at the same time NIKITA IVANITCH in a long white coat comes out of the dressing-room at the farthest end of the stage. SVIETLOVIDOFF sees IVANITCH--shrieks with terror and steps back] Who are you? What? What do you want? [Stamps his foot] Who are you?

IVANITCH. It is I, sir.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. Who are you?

IVANITCH. [Comes slowly toward him] It is I, sir, the prompter, Nikita Ivanitch. It is I, master, it is I!

SVIETLOVIDOFF. [Sinks helplessly onto the stool, breathes heavily and trembles violently] Heavens! Who are you? It is you . . . you Nikitushka? What . . . what are you doing here?

IVANITCH. I spend my nights here in the dressing-rooms. Only please be good enough not to tell Alexi Fomitch, sir. I have nowhere else to spend the night; indeed, I haven't.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. Ah! It is you, Nikitushka, is it? Just think, the audience called me out sixteen times; they brought me three wreathes and lots of other things, too; they were all wild with enthusiasm, and yet not a soul came when it was all over to wake the poor, drunken old man and take him home. And I am an old man, Nikitushka! I am sixty-eight years old, and I am ill. I haven't the heart left to go on. [Falls on IVANITCH'S neck and weeps] Don't go away, Nikitushka; I am old and helpless, and I feel it is time for me to die. Oh, it is dreadful, dreadful!

IVANITCH. [Tenderly and respectfully] Dear master! it is time for you to go home, sir!

SVIETLOVIDOFF. I won't go home; I have no home--none! none!--none!

IVANITCH. Oh, dear! Have you forgotten where you live?

SVIETLOVIDOFF. I won't go there. I won't! I am all alone there. I have nobody, Nikitushka! No wife--no children. I am like the wind blowing across the lonely fields. I shall die, and no one will remember me. It is awful to be alone--no one to cheer me, no one to caress me, no one to help me to bed when I am drunk. Whom do I belong to? Who needs me? Who loves me? Not a soul, Nikitushka.

IVANITCH. [Weeping] Your audience loves you, master.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. My audience has gone home. They are all asleep, and have forgotten their old clown. No, nobody needs me, nobody loves me; I have no wife, no children.

IVANITCH. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Don't be so unhappy about it.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. But I am a man, I am still alive. Warm, red blood is tingling in my veins, the blood of noble ancestors. I am an aristocrat, Nikitushka; I served in the army, in the artillery, before I fell as low as this, and what a fine young chap I was! Handsome, daring, eager! Where has it all gone? What has become of those old days? There's the pit that has swallowed them all! I remember it all now. Forty-five years of my life lie buried there, and what a life, Nikitushka! I can see it as clearly as I see your face: the ecstasy of youth, faith, passion, the love of women--women, Nikitushka!

IVANITCH. It is time you went to sleep, sir.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. When I first went on the stage, in the first glow of passionate youth, I remember a woman loved me for my acting. She was beautiful, graceful as a poplar, young, innocent, pure, and radiant as a summer dawn. Her smile could charm away the darkest night. I remember, I stood before her once, as I am now standing before you. She had never seemed so lovely to me as she did then, and she spoke to me so with her eyes--such a look! I shall never forget it, no, not even in the grave; so tender, so soft, so deep, so bright and young! Enraptured, intoxicated, I fell on my knees before her, I begged for my happiness, and she said: "Give up the stage!" Give up the stage! Do you understand? She could love an actor, but marry him--never! I was acting that day, I remember--I had a foolish, clown's part, and as I acted, I felt my eyes being opened; I saw that the worship of the art I had held so sacred was a delusion and an empty dream; that I was a slave, a fool, the plaything of the idleness of strangers. I understood my audience at last, and since that day I have not believed in their applause, or in their wreathes, or in their enthusiasm. Yes, Nikitushka! The people applaud me, they buy my photograph, but I am a stranger to them. They don't know me, I am as the dirt beneath their feet. They are willing enough to meet me . . . but allow a daughter or a sister to marry me, an outcast, never! I have no faith in them, [sinks onto the stool] no faith in them.

IVANITCH. Oh, sir! you look dreadfully pale, you frighten me to death! Come, go home, have mercy on me!

SVIETLOVIDOFF. I saw through it all that day, and the knowledge was dearly bought. Nikitushka! After that . . . when that girl . . . well, I began to wander aimlessly about, living from day to day without looking ahead. I took the parts of buffoons and low comedians, letting my mind go to wreck. Ah! but I was a great artist once, till little by little I threw away my talents, played the motley fool, lost my looks, lost the power of expressing myself, and became in the end a Merry Andrew instead of a man. I have been swallowed up in that great black pit. I

never felt it before, but to-night, when I woke up, I looked back, and there behind me lay sixty-eight years. I have just found out what it is to be old! It is all over . . . [sobs] . . . all over.

IVANITCH. There, there, dear master! Be quiet . . . gracious!
[Calls] Petrushka! Yegorka!

SVIETLOVIDOFF. But what a genius I was! You cannot imagine what power I had, what eloquence; how graceful I was, how tender; how many strings [beats his breast] quivered in this breast! It chokes me to think of it! Listen now, wait, let me catch my breath, there; now listen to this:

"The shade of bloody Ivan now returning
Fans through my lips rebellion to a flame,
I am the dead Dimitri! In the burning
Boris shall perish on the throne I claim.
Enough! The heir of Czars shall not be seen
Kneeling to yonder haughty Polish Queen!"*

*From "Boris Godunoff," by Pushkin. [translator's note]

Is that bad, eh? [Quickly] Wait, now, here's something from King Lear. The sky is black, see? Rain is pouring down, thunder roars, lightning--zzz zzz zzz--splits the whole sky, and then, listen:

"Blow winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
You sulphurous thought-executing fires
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts
Singe my white head! And thou, all shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world!
Crack nature's moulds, all germons spill at once
That make ungrateful man!"

[Impatiently] Now, the part of the fool. [Stamps his foot] Come take the fool's part! Be quick, I can't wait!

IVANITCH. [Takes the part of the fool]

"O, Nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house is better than this rain-water out o' door. Good Nuncle, in; ask thy daughter's blessing: here's a night pities neither wise men nor fools."

SVIETLOVIDOFF.

"Rumble thy bellyful! spit, fire! spout, rain!
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters;
I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children."

Ah! there is strength, there is talent for you! I'm a great artist! Now, then, here's something else of the same kind, to bring back my youth to me. For instance, take this, from Hamlet, I'll begin . . . Let me see, how does it go? Oh, yes, this is it.

[Takes the part of Hamlet]

"O! the recorders, let me see one.-- To withdraw with you. Why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as if you would drive me into a toil?"

IVANITCH. "O, my lord, if my duty be too bold, my love is too unmannerly."

SVIETLOVIDOFF. "I do not well understand that. Will you play upon this pipe?"

IVANITCH. "My lord, I cannot."

SVIETLOVIDOFF. "I pray you."

IVANITCH. "Believe me, I cannot."

SVIETLOVIDOFF. "I do beseech you."

IVANITCH. "I know no touch of it, my lord."

SVIETLOVIDOFF. "'Tis as easy as lying: govern these vantages with your finger and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops."

IVANITCH. "But these I cannot command to any utterance of harmony: I have not the skill."

SVIETLOVIDOFF. "Why, look you, how unworthy a thing you make of me. You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass; and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. S'blood! Do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me!" [laughs and clasps] Bravo! Encore! Bravo! Where the devil is there any old age in that? I'm not old, that is all nonsense, a torrent of strength rushes over me; this is life, freshness, youth! Old age and genius can't exist together. You seem to be struck dumb, Nikitushka. Wait a second, let me come to my senses again. Oh! Good Lord! Now then, listen! Did you ever hear such tenderness, such music? Sh! Softly;

"The moon had set. There was not any light,
Save of the lonely legion'd watch-stars pale
In outer air, and what by fits made bright
Hot oleanders in a rosy vale
Searched by the lamping fly, whose little spark
Went in and out, like passion's bashful hope."

[The noise of opening doors is heard] What's that?

IVANITCH. There are Petrushka and Yegorka coming back. Yes, you have genius, genius, my master.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. [Calls, turning toward the noise] Come here to me, boys! [To IVANITCH] Let us go and get dressed. I'm not old! All that is foolishness, nonsense! [laughs gaily] What are you crying for? You poor old granny, you, what's the matter now? This won't do! There, there, this won't do at all! Come, come, old man, don't stare so! What makes you stare like that? There, there! [Embraces him in tears] Don't cry! Where there is art and genius there can never be such things as old age or loneliness or sickness . . . and death itself is half . . . [Weeps] No, no, Nikitushka! It is all over for us now! What sort of a genius am I? I'm like a squeezed lemon, a cracked bottle, and you--you are the old rat of the theatre . . . a prompter! Come on! [They go] I'm no genius, I'm only fit to be in the suite of Fortinbras, and even for that I am too old.... Yes.... Do you remember those lines from Othello, Nikitushka?

"Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!
Farewell the plumed troops and the big wars
That make ambition virtue! O farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war!"

IVANITCH. Oh! You're a genius, a genius!

SVIETLOVIDOFF. And again this:

"Away! the moor is dark beneath the moon,
Rapid clouds have drunk the last pale beam of even:
Away! the gathering winds will call the darkness soon,
And profoundest midnight shroud the serene lights of heaven."

They go out together, the curtain falls slowly.

End of The Project Gutenberg Etext of Swan Song, by Anton Checkov

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](#)

[Baixar livros de Literatura](#)
[Baixar livros de Literatura de Cordel](#)
[Baixar livros de Literatura Infantil](#)
[Baixar livros de Matemática](#)
[Baixar livros de Medicina](#)
[Baixar livros de Medicina Veterinária](#)
[Baixar livros de Meio Ambiente](#)
[Baixar livros de Meteorologia](#)
[Baixar Monografias e TCC](#)
[Baixar livros Multidisciplinar](#)
[Baixar livros de Música](#)
[Baixar livros de Psicologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Química](#)
[Baixar livros de Saúde Coletiva](#)
[Baixar livros de Serviço Social](#)
[Baixar livros de Sociologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Teologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Trabalho](#)
[Baixar livros de Turismo](#)