

ENGLISH

THE HAPPY PRINCE

~Summary~

-by Oscar Wilde

The Statue of Happy Prince

A statue of a Prince is installed at the top of a tall column in the city. He was a real Prince at one time. He was happy when alive because he was kept ignorant of any sadness or suffering outside his palace walls. His life was one of joy and fulfilled desires. Upon his death, a statue was made depicting him which was covered in gold, had beautiful sapphires for eyes and had a ruby attached to the handle of his sword. Because of the value society places on gold and jewels, he was thought to be quite beautiful. 'Useless', remarked a Town Councillor, 'but beautiful.'

He is adored by all who see him. Unfortunately for the statue, his placement atop a high hill allows him to witness, for the first time, the pain and misery experienced by the poor of the city, of whom he had remained ignorant when alive.

The Swallow Arrives the Statue

The statue, once happy, now weeps with sadness to see the plight of so many who have so little. A self-serving swallow bird, on its annual winter migration to Egypt, arrives to take overnight shelter beneath this statue and eventually becomes affected with gratitude by the statue's kindness and desire to help others.

Swallow becomes Messenger to the Prince

The swallow becomes the statue's messenger and agrees to remove the jewels and the gold from it on the Prince's commands to bring contentment (satisfaction) badly needed financial security and compassion to the needy people seen by the Prince. These needy people include.

a seamstress, who has no money to feed her ill child, who is given the ruby,
a young man who is too poor to buy coal for his fireplace in the winter, who is given a sapphire,
a poor young girl who is barefoot and without a covering for the head in winter, who is given the other sapphire and
many poor and starving people, who were given parts of the gold leaf covering the Prince's statue.

The swallow acts as a messenger of the Prince to carry the jewels and gold to these needy people. As the statue's gold and jewels are taken and distributed among the poor, the Prince is no longer able to see the impoverished people around him as his eyes have been removed. He knows that poverty is there, and he is not blind to the sufferings of others as he once was. Even without eyes to see, he knows that poverty exists.

Winter Sets in and Swallow Dies

Eventually, as winter comes and it starts snowing, the swallow lies at the feet of the statue and dies from exposure (to the acute cold) and exhaustion (tired). He could never reach Egypt because he exchanged his dream of a warm climate and comfort with a bigger dream - to bring help to those who are in need.

Statue Breaks and is Melted

The heart of the sculpture cracks with sadness at the loss of his friend the swallow. The most beautiful part of the statue, the kind and giving heart-could not be seen from the outside.

Upon seeing the statue in such despair, the powerful people of the city - the Town Councillors and the Mayor decide that he is no longer useful, because he is no longer beautiful. Much like the poor, who were exploited and tossed away by the rich, the statue is taken down. When the statue is melted in a furnace, the broken heart made of lead does not melt. It is thrown away onto a dust heap where the dead swallow also lay.

God Asks for Two Most Precious Things

God asked for one of his Angels to bring him the two most precious things in the city. The Angel brought leaden heart of the Happy Prince and the dead swallow. God praised the choice of Angel. God said that the little bird would sing forever in his garden of paradise and the Happy Prince would praise him forever in his city of gold.

Conclusion of The Happy Prince

The chapter – The Happy Prince teaches us that we should show compassion towards the needy and help them however we can.