

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 5: THE HAPPY PRINCE



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.

NCERT SOLUTIONS

Questions (Page No. 36)

(Think about it)

Question 1. Why do the courtiers call the prince 'the Happy Prince'? Is he really happy? What does he see all around him?

Answer: The courtiers used to call the prince 'the Happy Prince' because when he was alive, he did not know what tears were, for he lived in the Palace, where sorrow was not allowed to enter.

No, he was not happy anymore. When he died, he was made into a statue and placed at a height from where he could see the ugliness and poverty in the city.

Question 2. Why does the Happy Prince send a ruby for the seamstress? What does the swallow do in the seamstress' house?

Answer: The Happy Prince sends a ruby for the seamstress because she was poor and her son was ill with fever. Her son asks her to give him oranges but all she has is river water.

The swallow was requested by the Happy Prince to visit and give the ruby to the seamstress. When the swallow reached her house, she was asleep and the little boy was tossing feverishly. The swallow kept the ruby on the table beside her thimble. He then gently went around the boy's bed, fanning the boy's forehead with his wings. The boy felt better and went into a deep sleep.

Question 3. For whom does the prince send the sapphires and why?

Answer: The prince sends the two sapphires of his eyes for a young writer and a match girl each.

The young writer was trying to finish a play for the Director of the Theatre, but he was too cold to write any more. There was no fire in the grate, and hunger had made him faint.

The Happy Prince sent one of the sapphires of his eyes to him so that he could sell it to the jeweler, buy firewood and finish his play.

The matchgirl's matches fell in the gutter and got spoiled. She was crying as her father would beat her for this mistake.

The Happy Prince sent the other sapphire to her so that she would not get beaten up when her father sees the gem she has got.

Question 4. What does the swallow see when it flies over the city?

Answer: When the swallow flies over the city, it sees the sharp difference between the lives of the rich and the poor. He sees the rich making merry in their beautiful houses, while the beggars were sitting at the gates. He flies into dark lanes and sees the white faces of starving children looking out listlessly at the black streets.

Question 5. Why did the swallow not leave the prince and go to Egypt?

Answer: The swallow did not leave the prince and go to Egypt. The prince had become blind after giving away his sapphires to the needy people. The swallow decided to stay with the prince as he was so touched with his kindness.

Question 6. What are the precious things mentioned in the story? Why are they precious?

Answer: The precious things mentioned in the story are: the leaden heart of the Happy Prince and the dead bird.

They are precious because they were generous and kind. The Happy Prince sacrificed the ruby of his sword so that the poor seamstress could get her son's fever treated. He even went on to sacrifice his sapphire eyes and became blind. He kept giving away the gold leaves of his statue to be helpful to the poor and needy.

The bird sacrificed his wish of going to Egypt with his friends and stayed with the Happy Prince instead. He ultimately sacrificed his life to stay with the prince and help people.

Thus, when God asked one of his angels to bring two most precious things, the angel brought the leaden heart of the Happy Prince and the dead bird.

The God said that the angel had rightly chosen them, as in his garden of Paradise, the little bird shall sing for ever more and in his city of gold, the Happy Prince shall praise him.