

Moments

Supplementary Reader in English
for Class IX



0960



राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

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FOREWORD

THE National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005, recommends that children's life at school must be linked to their life outside the school. This principle marks a departure from the legacy of bookish learning which continues to shape our system and causes a gap between the school, home and community. The syllabi and textbooks developed on the basis of NCF signify an attempt to implement this basic idea. They also attempt to discourage rote learning and the maintenance of sharp boundaries between different subject areas. We hope these measures will take us significantly further in the direction of a child-centred system of education outlined in the National Policy of Education (1986).

The success of this effort depends on the steps that school principals and teachers will take to encourage children to reflect on their own learning and to pursue imaginative activities and questions. We must recognise that, given space, time and freedom, children generate new knowledge by engaging with the information passed on to them by adults. Treating the prescribed textbook as the sole basis of examination is one of the key reasons why other resources and sites of learning are ignored. Inculcating creativity and initiative is possible if we perceive and treat children as participants in learning, not as receivers of a fixed body of knowledge.

These aims imply considerable change in school routines and mode of functioning. Flexibility in the daily time-table is as necessary as rigour in implementing the annual calendar so that the required number of teaching days are actually devoted to teaching. The methods used for teaching and evaluation will also determine how effective this book proves for making children's life at school a happy experience, rather than a source of stress or boredom. Syllabus designers have tried to address the problem of curricular burden by restructuring and reorienting knowledge at different stages with greater consideration for child psychology and the time available for teaching. The supplementary reader attempts to enhance this endeavour by giving higher priority and space to opportunities for contemplation and wondering, discussion in small groups, and activities requiring hands-on experience.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) appreciates the hard work done by the textbook development

committee responsible for this book. We wish to thank the Chairperson of the advisory group in languages, Professor Namwar Singh and the Chief Advisor for this book, Professor R. Amritavalli for guiding the work of this committee. Several teachers contributed to the development of this supplementary reader; we are grateful to their principals for making this possible. We are indebted to the institutions and organisations which have generously permitted us to draw upon their resources, materials and personnel. We are especially grateful to the members of the National Monitoring Committee, appointed by the Department of Secondary and Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development under the Chairpersonship of Professor Mrinal Miri and Professor G.P. Deshpande for their valuable time and contribution. As an organisation committed to systemic reform and continuous improvement in the quality of its products, NCERT welcomes comments and suggestions which will enable us to undertake further revision and refinements.

New Delhi
20 December 2005

Director
National Council of Educational
Research and Training

RATIONALISATION OF CONTENT IN THE TEXTBOOK

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to reduce content load on students. The National Education Policy 2020 also emphasises reducing the content load and providing opportunities for experiential learning with creative mindset. In this background, the NCERT has undertaken the exercise to rationalise the textbooks across all classes. Learning Outcomes developed by the NCERT across classes have been taken into consideration in this exercise.

Contents of the textbooks have been rationalised in view of the following:

- Content based on genres of literature in the textbooks and supplementary readers at different stages of school education
- Content that is meant for achieving Learning Outcomes for developing language proficiency and is accessible at different stages
- For reducing the curriculum load and examination stress in view of the prevailing condition of the pandemic
- Content, which is easily accessible to students without much interventions from teachers and can be learnt by children through self-learning or peer-learning
- Content, which is irrelevant in the present context

This present edition is a reformatted version after carrying out the changes given above.

A NOTE FOR THE TEACHER

MOMENTS, a supplementary reader in English for Class IX, is meant for extensive reading. It is designed to promote a love for reading by exposing the learners to a variety of materials.

An attempt has been made to provide learners with a rich reading experience through stories of mystery, adventure, courage, growing up, romance, wit and humour. These carefully selected pieces would cater to the needs and interests of adolescents and hold the mirror up to different aspects of life and people.

A deliberate effort has been made to gloss only some potentially difficult words in the stories to aid the reading process. The few questions given under 'Think About It' are all global questions, designed to help learners develop their ability of intelligent and imaginative reading. The 'Talk about It' section has discussion topics which take a constructive approach to the analysis of contemporary issues. The learners may be encouraged to interact with their classmates or seniors, integrate their understanding of the issues and make a purposeful, personalised, and imaginative oral presentation. A list of suggested readings is given at the end of each story to encourage learners to read extensively and independently.

THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

PREAMBLE

WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a ¹**[SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC]** and to secure to all its citizens :

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the ²[unity and integrity of the Nation];

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949 do **HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.**

1. Subs. by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec.2, for "Sovereign Democratic Republic" (w.e.f. 3.1.1977)
2. Subs. by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec.2, for "Unity of the Nation" (w.e.f. 3.1.1977)

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CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

Part IV A (Article 51 A)

Fundamental Duties

Fundamental Duties – It shall be the duty of every citizen of India —

- (a) to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem;
- (b) to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom;
- (c) to uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India;
- (d) to defend the country and render national service when called upon to do so;
- (e) to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;
- (f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;
- (g) to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures;
- (h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;
- (i) to safeguard public property and to abjure violence;
- (j) to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement;
- (k) who is a parent or guardian, to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of six and fourteen years.



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THE National Council of Educational Research and Training is grateful to Professor M.L. Tickoo, formerly of the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad, and the Regional Language Centre, Singapore, for going through the manuscript and making valuable suggestions.

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Special thanks are also due to the Publication Department, NCERT, for their support. NCERT gratefully acknowledges the contributions made by Matthew John, *Proofreader*, and Uttam Kumar, *DTP Operator*.

CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

Part III (Articles 12 – 35)

(Subject to certain conditions, some exceptions
and reasonable restrictions)

guarantees these

Fundamental Rights

Right to Equality

- before law and equal protection of laws;
- irrespective of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth;
- of opportunity in public employment;
- by abolition of untouchability and titles.

Right to Freedom

- of expression, assembly, association, movement, residence and profession;
- of certain protections in respect of conviction for offences;
- of protection of life and personal liberty;
- of free and compulsory education for children between the age of six and fourteen years;
- of protection against arrest and detention in certain cases.

Right against Exploitation

- for prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour;
- for prohibition of employment of children in hazardous jobs.

Right to Freedom of Religion

- freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion;
- freedom to manage religious affairs;
- freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion;
- freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in educational institutions wholly maintained by the State.

Cultural and Educational Rights

- for protection of interests of minorities to conserve their language, script and culture;
- for minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

Right to Constitutional Remedies

- by issuance of directions or orders or writs by the Supreme Court and High Courts for enforcement of these Fundamental Rights.



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1. The Lost Child



0960CH01

A child goes to a fair with his parents. He is happy and excited and wants the sweets and toys displayed there. But his parents don't buy them for him. Why then does he refuse when someone else offers them to him?

It was the festival of spring. From the wintry shades of narrow lanes and alleys emerged a gaily clad humanity. Some walked, some rode on horses, others sat, being carried in bamboo and bullock carts. One little boy ran between his father's legs, brimming over with life and laughter.



"Come, child, come," called his parents, as he lagged behind, fascinated by the toys in the shops that lined the way.

He hurried towards his parents, his feet obedient to their call, his eyes still lingering on the receding toys. As he came to where they had stopped to wait for him, he could not suppress the desire of his heart, even though he well knew the old, cold stare of refusal in their eyes.

"I want that toy," he pleaded.

His father looked at him red-eyed, in his familiar tyrant's way. His mother, melted by the free spirit of the day was tender and, giving him her finger to hold, said, "Look, child, what is before you!"

It was a flowering mustard-field, pale like melting gold as it swept across miles and miles of even land.

A group of dragon-flies were bustling about on their gaudy purple wings, intercepting the flight of a lone black bee or butterfly in search of sweetness from the flowers. The child followed them in the air with his gaze, till one of them would still its wings and rest, and he would try to catch it. But it would go fluttering, flapping, up into the air, when he had almost caught it in his hands. Then his mother gave a cautionary call: "Come, child, come, come on to the footpath."

He ran towards his parents gaily and walked abreast of them for a while, being, however, soon left behind, attracted by the little insects and worms along the footpath that were teeming out from their hiding places to enjoy the sunshine.

"Come, child, come!" his parents called from the shade of a grove where they had seated themselves on the edge of a well. He ran towards them.

A shower of young flowers fell upon the child as he entered the grove, and, forgetting his parents, he began to gather the raining petals in his hands. But lo! he heard the cooing of doves and ran towards his parents, shouting, "The dove! The dove!" The raining petals dropped from his forgotten hands.

"Come, child, come!" they called to the child, who had now gone running in wild capers round the banyan tree, and gathering him up they took the narrow, winding footpath which led to the fair through the mustard fields.

As they neared the village the child could see many other footpaths full of throngs, converging to the whirlpool of the fair, and felt at once repelled and fascinated by the confusion of the world he was entering.

A sweetmeat seller hawked, “*gulab-jaman, rasagulla, burfi, jalebi*,” at the corner of the entrance and a crowd pressed round his counter at the foot of an architecture of many coloured sweets, decorated with leaves of silver and gold. The child stared open-eyed and his mouth watered for the *burfi* that was his favourite sweet. “I want that *burfi*,” he slowly murmured. But he half knew as he begged that his plea would not be heeded because his parents would say he was greedy. So without waiting for an answer he moved on.

A flower-seller hawked, “A garland of *gulmohur*, a garland of *gulmohur*!” The child seemed irresistibly drawn. He went towards the basket where the flowers lay heaped and half murmured, “I want that garland.” But he well knew his parents would refuse to buy him those flowers because they would say that they were cheap. So, without waiting for an answer, he moved on.

A man stood holding a pole with yellow, red, green and purple balloons flying from it. The child was simply carried away by the rainbow glory of their silken colours and he was filled with an overwhelming desire to possess them all. But he well knew his parents would never buy him the balloons because they would say he was too old to play with such toys. So he walked on farther.

A snake-charmer stood playing a flute to a snake which coiled itself in a basket, its head raised in a graceful bend like the neck of a swan, while the music stole into its invisible ears like the gentle rippling of an invisible waterfall. The child went towards the snake-charmer. But, knowing his parents had forbidden him to hear such coarse music as the snake-charmer played, he proceeded farther.

There was a roundabout in full swing. Men, women and children, carried away in a whirling motion, shrieked and cried with dizzy laughter. The child watched them intently and then he made a bold request: “I want to go on the roundabout, please, Father, Mother.”

There was no reply. He turned to look at his parents. They were not there, ahead of him. He turned to look on either side. They were not there. He looked behind. There was no sign of them.

A full, deep cry rose within his dry throat and with a sudden jerk of his body he ran from where he stood, crying in real fear, "Mother, Father." Tears rolled down from his eyes, hot and fierce; his flushed face was convulsed with fear. Panic-stricken, he ran to one side first, then to the other, hither and thither in all directions, knowing not where to go. "Mother, Father," he wailed. His yellow turban came untied and his clothes became muddy.

Having run to and fro in a rage of running for a while, he stood defeated, his cries suppressed into sobs. At little distances on the green grass he could see, through his filmy eyes, men and women talking. He tried to look intently among the patches of bright yellow clothes, but there was no sign of his father and mother among these people, who seemed to laugh and talk just for the sake of laughing and talking.

He ran quickly again, this time to a shrine to which people seemed to be crowding. Every little inch of space here was congested with men, but he ran through people's legs, his little sob lingering: "Mother, Father!" Near the entrance to the temple, however, the crowd became very thick: men jostled each other, heavy men, with flashing, murderous eyes and hefty shoulders. The poor child struggled to thrust a way between their feet but, knocked to and fro by their brutal movements, he might have been trampled underfoot, had he not shrieked at the highest pitch of his voice, "Father, Mother!" A man in the surging crowd heard his cry and, stooping with great difficulty, lifted him up in his arms.

"How did you get here, child? Whose baby are you?" the man asked as he steered clear of the mass. The child wept more bitterly than ever now and only cried, "I want my mother, I want my father!"

The man tried to soothe him by taking him to the roundabout. "Will you have a ride on the horse?" he gently asked as he approached the ring. The child's throat tore into a thousand shrill sobs and he only shouted, "I want my mother, I want my father!"



The man headed towards the place where the snake-charmer still played on the flute to the swaying cobra. "Listen to that nice music, child!" he pleaded. But the child shut his ears with his fingers and shouted his double-pitched strain: "I want my mother, I want my father!" The man took him near the balloons, thinking the bright colours of the balloons would distract the child's attention and quieten him. "Would you like a rainbow-coloured balloon?" he persuasively asked. The child turned his eyes from the flying balloons and just sobbed, "I want my mother, I want my father!"

The man, still trying to make the child happy, bore him to the gate where the flower-seller sat. "Look! Can you smell those nice flowers, child! Would you like a garland to put round your neck?"



The child turned his nose away from the basket and reiterated his sob, “I want my mother, I want my father!”

Thinking to humour his disconsolate charge by a gift of sweets, the man took him to the counter of the sweet shop. “What sweets would you like, child?” he asked. The child turned his face from the sweet shop and only sobbed, “I want my mother, I want my father!”

MULK RAJ ANAND

THINK About It

1. What are the things the child sees on his way to the fair? Why does he lag behind?
2. In the fair he wants many things. What are they? Why does he move on without waiting for an answer?
3. When does he realise that he has lost his way? How have his anxiety and insecurity been described?
4. Why does the lost child lose interest in the things that he had wanted earlier?
5. What do you think happens in the end? Does the child find his parents?

TALK About It

How to ensure not to get lost.

SUGGESTED READING

- *The Coolie* by Mulk Raj Anand
- ‘Kabuliwallah’ by Rabindranath Tagore



2. The Adventures of Toto



0960CH02

Have you ever had a baby monkey as a pet? Toto is a baby monkey. Let's find out whether he is mischievous or docile.

GRANDFATHER bought Toto from a tonga-driver for the sum of five rupees. The tonga-driver used to keep the little red monkey tied to a feeding-trough, and the monkey looked so out of place there that Grandfather decided he would add the little fellow to his private zoo.

Toto was a pretty monkey. His bright eyes sparkled with mischief beneath deep-set eyebrows, and his teeth, which were a pearly white, were very often displayed in a smile that frightened the life out of elderly Anglo-Indian ladies. But his hands looked dried-up as though they had been pickled in the sun for many years. Yet his fingers were quick and wicked; and his tail, while adding to his good looks (Grandfather believed a tail would add to anyone's good looks), also served as a third hand. He could use it to hang from a branch; and it was capable of scooping up any delicacy that might be out of reach of his hands.

Grandmother always fussed when Grandfather brought home some new bird or animal. So it was decided that Toto's presence should be kept a secret from her until she was in a particularly good mood. Grandfather and I put him away in a little closet opening into my bedroom wall, where he was tied securely — or so we thought — to a peg fastened into the wall.

A few hours later, when Grandfather and I came back to release Toto, we found that the walls, which had been covered with some ornamental paper chosen by Grandfather, now stood out as naked brick and plaster. The peg in the wall had been wrenched from its socket, and my school blazer, which had been hanging there, was in shreds. I wondered what Grandmother

would say. But Grandfather didn't worry; he seemed pleased with Toto's performance.

"He's clever," said Grandfather. "Given time, I'm sure he could have tied the torn pieces of your blazer into a rope, and made his escape from the window!"

His presence in the house still a secret, Toto was now transferred to a big cage in the servants' quarters where a number of Grandfather's pets lived very sociably together — a tortoise, a pair of rabbits, a tame squirrel and, for a while, my pet goat. But the monkey wouldn't allow any of his companions to sleep at night; so Grandfather, who had to leave Dehra Dun next day to collect his pension in Saharanpur, decided to take him along.

Unfortunately I could not accompany Grandfather on that trip, but he told me about it afterwards. A big black canvas kit-bag was provided for Toto. This, with some straw at the bottom, became his new abode. When the bag was closed, there was no escape. Toto could not get his hands through the opening, and the canvas was too strong for him to bite his way through. His efforts to get out only had the effect of making the bag roll about on the floor or occasionally jump into the air — an exhibition that attracted a curious crowd of onlookers on the Dehra Dun railway platform.

Toto remained in the bag as far as Saharanpur, but while Grandfather was producing his ticket at the railway turnstile, Toto suddenly poked his head out of the bag and gave the ticket-collector a wide grin.

The poor man was taken aback; but, with great presence of mind and much to Grandfather's annoyance, he said, "Sir, you have a dog with you. You'll have to pay for it accordingly."

In vain did Grandfather take Toto out of the bag; in vain did he try to prove that a monkey did not qualify as a dog, or even as a quadruped. Toto was classified a dog by the ticket-collector; and three rupees was the sum handed over as his fare.

Then Grandfather, just to get his own back, took from his pocket our pet tortoise, and said, "What must I pay for this, since you charge for all animals?"

The ticket-collector looked closely at the tortoise, prodded it with his forefinger, gave Grandfather a pleased and triumphant look, and said, "No charge. It is not a dog."



When Toto was finally accepted by Grandmother he was given a comfortable home in the stable, where he had for a companion the family donkey, Nana. On Toto's first night in the stable, Grandfather paid him a visit to see if he was comfortable. To his surprise he found Nana, without apparent cause, pulling at her halter and trying to keep her head as far as possible from a bundle of hay.

Grandfather gave Nana a slap across her haunches, and she jerked back, dragging Toto with her. He had fastened on to her long ears with his sharp little teeth.

Toto and Nana never became friends.

A great treat for Toto during cold winter evenings was the large bowl of warm water given him by Grandmother for his bath. He would cunningly test the temperature with his hand, then gradually step into the bath, first one foot, then the other (as he had seen me doing), until he was into the water up to his neck.



Once comfortable, he would take the soap in his hands or feet, and rub himself all over. When the water became cold, he would get out and run as quickly as he could to the kitchen-fire in order to dry himself. If anyone laughed at him during this performance, Toto's feelings would be hurt and he would refuse to go on with his bath. One day Toto nearly succeeded in boiling himself alive.

A large kitchen kettle had been left on the fire to boil for tea and Toto, finding himself with nothing better to do, decided to remove the lid. Finding the water just warm enough for a bath, he got in, with his head sticking out from the open kettle. This was just fine for a while, until the water began to boil. Toto then raised himself a little; but, finding it cold outside, sat down again. He continued hopping up and down for some time, until Grandmother arrived and hauled him, half-boiled, out of the kettle.

If there is a part of the brain especially devoted to mischief, that part was largely developed in Toto. He was always tearing things to pieces. Whenever one of my aunts came near him, he made every effort to get hold of her dress and tear a hole in it.

One day, at lunch-time, a large dish of *pullao* stood in the centre of the dining-table. We entered the room to find Toto stuffing himself with rice. My grandmother screamed — and Toto threw a plate at her. One of my aunts rushed forward — and received a glass of water in the face. When Grandfather arrived, Toto picked up the dish of *pullao* and made his exit through a window. We found him in the branches of the jackfruit tree, the dish still in his arms. He remained there all afternoon, eating slowly through the rice, determined on finishing every grain. And then, in order to spite Grandmother, who had screamed at him, he threw the dish down from the tree, and chattered with delight when it broke into a hundred pieces.

Obviously Toto was not the sort of pet we could keep for long. Even Grandfather realised that. We were not well-to-do, and could not afford the frequent loss of dishes, clothes, curtains and wallpaper. So Grandfather found the tonga-driver, and sold Toto back to him — for only three rupees.

RUSKIN BOND

Glossary

turnstile: a mechanical gate consisting of revolving horizontal arms fixed to a vertical post, allowing only one person at a time to pass through



halter: a rope or strap placed around the head of a horse or other animal, used for leading or tethering it

THINK About It

1. How does Toto come to grandfather's private zoo?
2. "Toto was a pretty monkey." In what sense is Toto pretty?
3. Why does grandfather take Toto to Saharanpur and how? Why does the ticket collector insist on calling Toto a dog?
4. How does Toto take a bath? Where has he learnt to do this? How does Toto almost boil himself alive?
5. Why does the author say, "Toto was not the sort of pet we could keep for long"?

TALK About It

Do you have a pet? Is your pet mischievous? Tell the class about it.

SUGGESTED READING

- *My Family and Other Animals* by Gerald Durrell
- 'Grandfather's Private Zoo' by Ruskin Bond
- *Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling





3. Iswaran the Storyteller



0960CH03

One night Mahendra woke up from his sleep and saw "a dark cloudy form". He broke out into a cold sweat. Was it a ghost?



THE story was narrated to Ganesh by a young man, Mahendra by name. He was a junior supervisor in a firm which offered on hire supervisors at various types of construction sites: factories, bridges, dams, and so on. Mahendra's job was to keep an eye on the activities at the work site. He had to keep moving from place to place every now and then as ordered by his head office: from a coal mining area to a railway bridge construction site, from there after a few months to a chemical plant which was coming up somewhere.

He was a bachelor. His needs were simple and he was able to adjust himself to all kinds of odd conditions, whether it was an ill-equipped circuit house or a makeshift canvas tent in the middle of a stone quarry. But one asset he had was his cook, Iswaran. The cook was quite attached to Mahendra and followed him uncomplainingly wherever he was posted. He cooked for Mahendra, washed his clothes and chatted away with his master at night. He could weave out endless stories and anecdotes on varied subjects.

Iswaran also had an amazing capacity to produce vegetables and cooking ingredients, seemingly out of nowhere, in the middle of a desolate landscape with no shops visible for miles around. He would miraculously conjure up the most delicious dishes made with fresh vegetables within an hour of arriving at the zinc-sheet shelter at the new workplace.

Mahendra would be up early in the morning and leave for work after breakfast, carrying some prepared food with him. Meanwhile Iswaran would tidy up the shed, wash the clothes, and have a leisurely bath, pouring several buckets of water over his head, muttering a prayer all the while. It would be lunchtime by then. After eating, he would read for a while before dozing off. The book was usually some popular Tamil thriller running to hundreds of pages. Its imaginative descriptions and narrative flourishes would hold Iswaran in thrall.

His own descriptions were greatly influenced by the Tamil authors that he read. When he was narrating even the smallest of incidents, he would try to work in suspense and a surprise ending into the account. For example, instead of saying that he had come across an uprooted tree on the highway, he would say, with eyebrows suitably arched and hands held out in a dramatic gesture, "The road was deserted and I was all alone. Suddenly I spotted something that looked like an enormous bushy beast lying sprawled across the road. I was half inclined to turn and go back. But as I came closer I saw that it was a fallen tree, with its dry branches spread out." Mahendra would stretch himself back in his canvas chair and listen to Iswaran's tales uncritically.

"The place I come from is famous for timber," Iswaran would begin. "There is a richly wooded forest all around. The logs are hauled on to the lorries by elephants. They are huge well-fed beasts. When they turn wild even the most experienced mahout is not able to control them." After this prologue Iswaran would launch into an elaborate anecdote involving an elephant.

"One day a tusker escaped from the timber yard and began to roam about, stamping on bushes, tearing up wild creepers and breaking branches at will. You know, sir, how an elephant behaves when it goes mad." Iswaran would get so caught up in the excitement of his own story that he would get up from the floor and jump about, stamping his feet in emulation of the mad elephant.

"The elephant reached the outskirts of our town; breaking the fences down like matchsticks," he would continue. "It came into the main road and smashed all the stalls selling fruits, mud pots and clothes. People ran helter-skelter in panic! The elephant now entered a school ground where children were playing, breaking through the brick wall. All the boys ran into the classrooms and shut the doors tight. The beast grunted and wandered about, pulling out the football goal-post, tearing down the volleyball net, kicking and flattening the drum kept for water, and uprooting the shrubs. Meanwhile all the teachers had climbed up to the terrace of the school building; from there they helplessly watched the depredations of the elephant. There was not a soul below on the ground. The streets were empty as if the inhabitants of the entire town had suddenly disappeared.

"I was studying in the junior class at that time, and was watching the whole drama from the rooftop. I don't know what came over me suddenly. I grabbed a cane from the hands of one of the teachers and ran down the stairs and into the open. The elephant grunted and menacingly swung a branch of a tree which it held in its trunk. It stamped its feet, kicking up a lot of mud and dust. It looked frightening. But I moved slowly towards it, stick in hand. People were watching the scene hypnotised from nearby housetops. The elephant looked at me red-eyed, ready to rush towards me. It lifted its trunk and trumpeted loudly. At that moment I moved forward and, mustering all my force, whacked

its third toenail on the quick. The beast looked stunned for a moment; then it shivered from head to foot — and collapsed."

At this point Iswaran would leave the story unfinished, and get up mumbling, "I will be back after lighting the gas and warming up the dinner." Mahendra who had been listening with rapt attention would be left hanging. When he returned, Iswaran would not pick up the thread of the story right away. Mahendra would have to remind him that the conclusion was pending. "Well, a veterinary doctor was summoned to revive the animal," Iswaran would shrug casually. "Two days later it was led away by its mahout to the jungle."

"Well, how did you manage to do it, Iswaran — how did you bring down the beast?"

"It has something to do with a Japanese art, I think, sir. Karate or ju-jitsu it is called. I had read about it somewhere. It temporarily paralyses the nervous system, you see."

Not a day passed without Iswaran recounting some story packed with adventure, horror and suspense. Whether the story was credible or not, Mahendra enjoyed listening to it because of the inimitable way in which it was told. Iswaran seemed to more than make up for the absence of a TV in Mahendra's living quarters.

One morning when Mahendra was having breakfast Iswaran asked, "Can I make something special for dinner tonight, sir? After all today is an auspicious day — according to tradition we prepare various delicacies to feed the spirits of our ancestors today, sir."

That night Mahendra enjoyed the most delicious dinner and complimented Iswaran on his culinary skills. He seemed very pleased but, unexpectedly, launched into a most garish account involving the supernatural.

"You know, sir, this entire factory area we are occupying was once a burial ground," he started. Mahendra was jerked out of the pleasant reverie he had drifted into after the satisfying meal.

"I knew on the first day itself when I saw a human skull lying on the path. Even now I come across a number of skulls and bones," Iswaran continued.



He went on to narrate how he sometimes saw ghosts at night. "I am not easily frightened by these things, sir. I am a brave fellow. But one horrible ghost of a woman which appears off and on at midnight during the full moon... It is an ugly creature with matted hair and a shrivelled face, like a skeleton holding a foetus in its arms."

Mahendra shivered at the description and interrupted rather sharply, "You are crazy, Iswaran. There are no such things as ghosts or spirits. It is all a figment of your imagination. Get your digestive system examined — and maybe your head as well. You are talking nonsense."

He left the room and retired for the night, expecting Iswaran to sulk for a couple of days. But the next morning he was surprised to find the cook as cheerful and talkative as ever.

From that day on Mahendra, for all his brave talk, went to bed with a certain unease. Every night he peered into the darkness

outside through the window next to his bed, trying to make sure that there was no movement of dark shapes in the vicinity. But he could only see a sea of darkness with the twinkling lights of the factory miles away.

He had always liked to admire the milk-white landscape on full-moon nights. But after hearing Iswaran's story of the female ghost he avoided looking out of his window altogether when the moon was full.

One night, Mahendra was woken up from his sleep by a low moan close to his window. At first he put it down to a cat prowling around for mice. But the sound was too guttural for a cat. He resisted the curiosity to look out lest he should behold a sight which would stop his heart. But the wailing became louder and less feline. He could not resist the temptation any more. Lowering himself to the level of the windowsill he looked out at the white sheet of moonlight outside. There, not too far away, was a dark cloudy form clutching a bundle. Mahendra broke into a cold sweat and fell back on the pillow, panting. As he gradually recovered from the ghastly experience he began to reason with himself, and finally concluded that it must have been some sort of auto suggestion, some trick that his subconscious had played on him.

By the time he had got up in the morning, had a bath and come out to have his breakfast, the horror of the previous night had faded from his memory. Iswaran greeted him at the door with his lunch packet and his bag. Just as Mahendra was stepping out Iswaran grinned and said, "Sir, remember the other day when I was telling you about the female ghost with a foetus in its arms, you were so angry with me for imagining things? Well, you saw her yourself last night. I came running hearing the sound of moaning that was coming from your room..."

A chill went down Mahendra's spine. He did not wait for Iswaran to complete his sentence. He hurried away to his office and handed in his papers, resolving to leave the haunted place the very next day!

R.K. LAXMAN

Iswaran the Storyteller/ 17



Glossary

in thrall: the state of being in someone's power

depredations: attacks which are made to destroy something

guttural sound: sound produced in the throat; harsh-sounding

feline: relating to cats or other members of the cat family

THINK About It

1. In what way is Iswaran an asset to Mahendra?
2. How does Iswaran describe the uprooted tree on the highway? What effect does he want to create in his listeners?
3. How does he narrate the story of the tusker? Does it appear to be plausible?
4. Why does the author say that Iswaran seemed to more than make up for the absence of a TV in Mahendra's living quarters?
5. Mahendra calls ghosts or spirits a figment of the imagination. What happens to him on a full-moon night?
6. Can you think of some other ending for the story?

TALK About It

Is Iswaran a fascinating storyteller? Discuss with your friends the qualities of a good storyteller. Try to use these qualities and tell a story.

SUGGESTED READING

- 'The Story Teller' by Saki (H.H. Munro)
- *Ghost Stories* (ed.) Ruskin Bond
- 'The Canterville Ghost' by Oscar Wilde
- 'Pret in the House' by Ruskin Bond



4. In the Kingdom of Fools



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It is believed that fools are so dangerous that only very wise people can manage them. Who are the fools in this story? What happens to them?

In the Kingdom of Fools, both the king and the minister were idiots. They didn't want to run things like other kings, so they decided to change night into day and day into night. They ordered that everyone should be awake at night, till their fields and run their businesses only after dark, and go to bed as soon as the sun came up. Anyone who disobeyed would be punished with death. The people did as they were told for fear of death. The king and the minister were delighted at the success of their project. One day a guru and his disciple arrived in the city. It was a beautiful city, it was broad daylight, but there was no one about. Everyone was asleep, not a mouse stirring. Even the cattle had been taught to sleep by day. The two strangers were amazed by what they saw around them and wandered around town till evening, when suddenly the whole town woke up and went about its nightly business.

The two men were hungry. Now that the shops were open, they went to buy some groceries. To their astonishment, they found that everything cost the same, a single *duddu* — whether they bought a measure of rice or a bunch of bananas, it cost a *duddu*. The guru and his disciple were delighted. They had never heard of anything like this. They could buy all the food they wanted for a rupee.

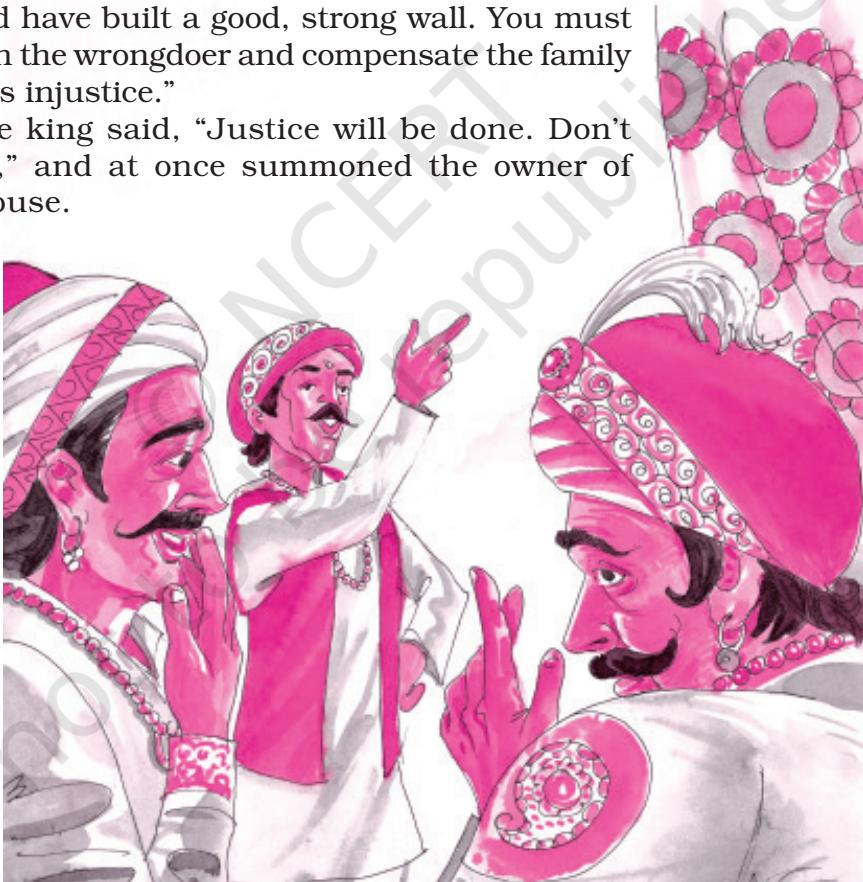
When they had cooked and eaten, the guru realised that this was a kingdom of fools and it wouldn't be a good idea for them to stay there. "This is no place for us. Let's go," he said to his disciple. But the disciple didn't want to leave the place. Everything was cheap here. All he wanted was good, cheap food. The guru said,

"They are all fools. This won't last very long, and you can't tell what they'll do to you next."

But the disciple wouldn't listen to the guru's wisdom. He wanted to stay. The guru finally gave up and said, "Do what you want. I'm going," and left. The disciple stayed on, ate his fill every day — bananas and ghee and rice and wheat, and grew fat like a street-side sacred bull.

One bright day, a thief broke into a rich merchant's house. He had made a hole in the wall and sneaked in, and as he was carrying out his loot, the wall of the old house collapsed on his head and killed him on the spot. His brother ran to the king and complained, "Your Highness, when my brother was pursuing his ancient trade, a wall fell on him and killed him. This merchant is to blame. He should have built a good, strong wall. You must punish the wrongdoer and compensate the family for this injustice."

The king said, "Justice will be done. Don't worry," and at once summoned the owner of the house.



When the merchant arrived, the king questioned him.

“What’s your name?”

“Such and Such, Your Highness.”

“Were you at home when the dead man burgled your house?”

“Yes, My Lord. He broke in and the wall was weak. It fell on him.”

“The accused pleads guilty. Your wall killed this man’s brother.

You have murdered a man. We have to punish you.”

“Lord,” said the helpless merchant, “I didn’t put up the wall. It’s really the fault of the man who built the wall. He didn’t build it right. You should punish him.”

“Who is that?”

“My Lord, this wall was built in my father’s time. I know the man. He’s an old man now. He lives nearby.”

The king sent out messengers to bring in the bricklayer who had built the wall. They brought him, tied hand and foot.

“You there, did you build this man’s wall in his father’s time?”

“Yes, My Lord, I did.”

“What kind of a wall is this that you built? It has fallen on a poor man and killed him. You’ve murdered him. We have to punish you by death.”

Before the king could order the execution, the poor bricklayer pleaded, “Please listen to me before you give your orders. It’s true I built this wall and it was no good. But that was because my mind was not on it. I remember very well a dancing girl who was going up and down that street all day with her anklets jingling, and I couldn’t keep my eyes or my mind on the wall I was building. You must get that dancing girl. I know where she lives.”

“You’re right. The case deepens. We must look into it. It is not easy to judge such complicated cases. Let’s get that dancer, wherever she is.”

The dancing girl, now an old woman, came trembling to the court.

“Did you walk up and down that street many years ago, while this poor man was building a wall? Did you see him?”

“Yes, My Lord, I remember it very well.”

“So you did walk up and down, with your anklets jingling. You were young and you distracted him, so he built a bad wall.





It has fallen on a poor burglar and killed him. You've killed an innocent man. You'll have to be punished."

She thought for a minute and said, "My Lord, wait. I know now why I was walking up and down that street. I had given some gold to the goldsmith to make some jewellery for me. He was a lazy scoundrel. He made so many excuses, said he would give it now and he would give it then and so on all day. He made me walk up and down to his house a dozen times.

That was when this bricklayer saw me. It's not my fault, My Lord, it's the damned goldsmith's fault."

"Poor thing, she's absolutely right," thought the king, weighing the evidence. "We've got the real culprit at last. Get the goldsmith, wherever he is hiding. At once!"

The king's bailiffs searched for the goldsmith, who was hiding in a corner of his shop. When he heard the accusation against him, he had his own story to tell.

"My Lord," he said, "I'm a poor goldsmith. It's true I made this dancer come many times to my door. I gave her excuses because I couldn't finish making her jewellery before I finished the rich merchant's orders. They had a wedding coming, and they wouldn't wait. You know how impatient rich men are!"

"Who is this rich merchant who kept you from finishing this poor woman's jewellery, made her walk up and down, which distracted this bricklayer, which made a mess of his wall, which has now

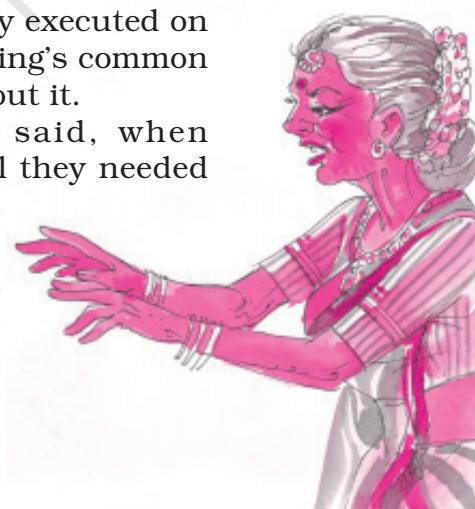
fallen on an innocent man and killed him? Can you name him?"

The goldsmith named the merchant, and he was none other than the original owner of the house whose wall had fallen. Now justice had come full circle, thought the king, back to the merchant. When he was rudely summoned back to the court, he arrived crying, "It wasn't me but my father who ordered the jewellery! He's dead! I'm innocent!"

But the king consulted his minister and ruled decisively: "It's true your father is the true murderer. He's dead, but somebody must be punished in his place. You've inherited everything from that criminal father of yours, his riches as well as his sins. I knew at once, even when I first set eyes on you, that you were at the root of this horrible crime. You must die."

And he ordered a new stake to be made ready for the execution. As the servants sharpened the stake and got it ready for the final impaling of the criminal, it occurred to the minister that the rich merchant was somehow too thin to be properly executed on the stake. He appealed to the king's common sense. The king too worried about it.

"What shall we do?" he said, when suddenly it struck him that all they needed to do was to find a man fat enough to fit the stake. The servants were immediately sent all over the town looking for a man who would fit the stake, and their eyes fell on the disciple who had fattened himself for months on bananas and rice and wheat and ghee.



"What have I done wrong? I'm innocent. I'm a sanyasi!" he cried.

"That may be true. But it's the royal decree that we should find a man fat enough to fit the stake," they said, and carried him to the place of execution. He remembered his wise guru's words: "This is a city of fools. You don't know what they will do next." While he was waiting for death, he prayed to his guru in his heart, asking him to hear his cry wherever he was. The guru saw everything in a vision; he had magic powers, he could see far, and he could see the future as he could see the present and the past. He arrived at once to save his disciple, who had got himself into such a scrape through love of food.

As soon as he arrived, he scolded the disciple and told him something in a whisper. Then he went to the king and addressed him, "O wisest of kings, who is greater? The guru or the disciple?"

"Of course, the guru. No doubt about it. Why do you ask?"

"Then put me to the stake first. Put my disciple to death after me."



When the disciple heard this, he understood and began to clamour, "Me first! You brought me here first! Put me to death first, not him!"

The guru and the disciple now got into a fight about who should go first. The king was puzzled by this behaviour. He asked the guru, "Why do you want to die? We chose him because we needed a fat man for the stake."

"You shouldn't ask me such questions. Put me to death first," replied the guru.

"Why? There's some mystery here. As a wise man you must make me understand."

"Will you promise to put me to death if I tell you?" asked the guru. The king gave him his solemn word. The guru took him aside, out of the servants' earshot, and whispered to him, "Do you know why we want to die right now, the two of us? We've been all over the world but we've never found a city like this or a king like you. That stake is the stake of the god of justice. It's new, it has never had a criminal on it. Whoever dies on it first will be reborn as the king of this country. And whoever goes next will be the future minister of this country. We're sick of our ascetic life. It would be nice to enjoy ourselves as king and minister for a while. Now keep your word, My Lord, and put us to death. Me first, remember?"

The king was now thrown into deep thought. He didn't want to lose the kingdom to someone else in the next round of life. He needed time. So he ordered the execution postponed to the next day and talked in secret with his minister. "It's not right for us to give over the kingdom to others in the next life. Let's go on the stake ourselves and we'll be reborn as king and minister again. Holy men do not tell lies," he said, and the minister agreed.

So he told the executioners, "We'll send the criminals tonight. When the first man comes to you, put him to death first. Then do the same to the second man. Those are my orders. Don't make any mistake."

That night, the king and his minister went secretly to the prison, released the guru and the disciple, disguised themselves as the two, and as arranged beforehand with loyal servants, were taken to the stake and promptly executed.

In the Kingdom of Fools/ 25





When the bodies were taken down to be thrown to crows and vultures the people panicked. They saw before them the dead bodies of the king and the minister. The city was in confusion.

All night they mourned and discussed the future of the kingdom. Some people suddenly thought of the guru and the disciple and caught up with them as they were preparing to leave town unnoticed. "We people need a king and a minister," said someone. Others agreed. They begged the guru and the disciple to be their king and their minister. It didn't take many arguments to persuade the disciple, but it took longer to persuade the guru. They finally agreed to rule the kingdom of the foolish king and the silly minister, on the condition that they could change all the old laws.

From then on, night would again be night and day would again be day, and you could get nothing for a *duddu*. It became like any other place.

[A Kannada folktale from A.K. Ramanujan's
Folk Tales from India]

Glossary

bailiff: a law officer who makes sure that the decisions of a court are obeyed

scrape: a difficult situation that one has got into

THINK About It

1. What are the two strange things the guru and his disciple find in the Kingdom of Fools?
2. Why does the disciple decide to stay in the Kingdom of Fools? Is it a good idea?
3. Name all the people who are tried in the king's court, and give the reasons for their trial.
4. Who is the real culprit according to the king? Why does he escape punishment?
5. What are the Guru's words of wisdom? When does the disciple remember them?
6. How does the guru manage to save his disciple's life?

TALK About It

In Shakespeare's plays the fool is not really foolish. If you have read or seen Shakespeare's plays such as *King Lear*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, you may talk about the role of the fool.

Do you know any stories in your language about wise fools, such as Tenali Rama or Gopal Bhar? You can also read about them in Ramanujan's collection of folk tales.

SUGGESTED READING

- *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb
- *Folk Tales from India: A Selection of Oral Tales from Twenty-two Languages* Selected and Edited by A.K. Ramanujan
- *Classic Folk Tales from Around the World* Edited by Robert Nye



5. The Happy Prince



0960CH05

The Happy Prince was a beautiful statue. He was covered with gold, he had sapphires for eyes, and a ruby in his sword. Why did he want to part with all the gold that he had, and his precious stones?

HIGH above the city, on a tall column, stood the statue of the Happy Prince. He was gilded all over with thin leaves of fine gold, for eyes he had two bright sapphires, and a large red ruby glowed on his sword hilt.

One night there flew over the city a little swallow. His friends had gone away to Egypt six weeks before, but he had stayed behind; then he decided to go to Egypt too.

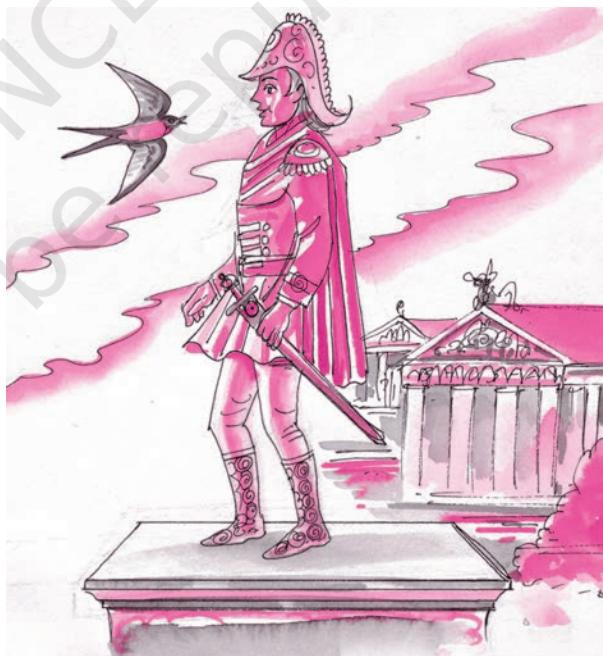
All day long he flew, and at night time he arrived at the city.

"Where shall I put up?" he said. "I hope the town has made preparations."

Then he saw the statue on the tall column.

"I will put up there," he cried. "It is a fine position with plenty of fresh air." So he alighted just between the feet of the Happy Prince.

"I have a golden bed-room," he said softly to himself as he looked round, and he



prepared to go to sleep; but just as he was putting his head under his wing a large drop of water fell on him. "What a curious thing!" he cried. "There is not a single cloud in the sky, the stars are quite clear and bright, and yet it is raining."

Then another drop fell.

"What is the use of a statue if it cannot keep the rain off?" he said. "I must look for a good chimney pot," and he determined to fly away.

But before he had opened his wings, a third drop fell, and he looked up, and saw — Ah! What did he see?

The eyes of the Happy Prince were filled with tears, and tears were running down his golden cheeks. His face was so beautiful in the moonlight that the little swallow was filled with pity.

"Who are you?" he said.

"I am the Happy Prince."

"Why are you weeping then?" asked the swallow. "You have quite drenched me."

"When I was alive and had a human heart," answered the statue, "I did not know what tears were, for I lived in the Palace, where sorrow is not allowed to enter. My courtiers called me the Happy Prince, and happy indeed I was. So I lived, and so I died. And now that I am dead they have set me up here so high that I can see the ugliness and all the misery of my city, and though my heart is made of lead yet I cannot choose but weep."

'What! Is he not solid gold?' said the swallow to himself. He was too polite to make any personal remarks.

"Far away," continued the statue in a low musical voice, "far away in a little street there is a poor house. One of the windows is open, and through it I can see a woman seated at a table. Her face is thin and worn, and she has coarse, red hands, all pricked by the needle, for she is a seamstress. She is embroidering flowers on a satin gown for the loveliest of the Queen's maids of honour, to wear at the next Court ball. In a bed in the corner of the room her little boy is lying ill. He has a fever, and is asking his mother to give him oranges. His mother has nothing to give him but river water, so he is crying. Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow, will you not bring her the ruby out of my sword hilt? My feet are fastened to this pedestal and I cannot move."

"I am waited for in Egypt," said the swallow. "My friends are flying up and down the Nile, and talking to the large lotus flowers. Soon they will go to sleep."

The Prince asked the swallow to stay with him for one night and be his messenger. "The boy is so thirsty, and the mother so sad," he said.

"I don't think I like boys," answered the swallow. "I want to go to Egypt."

But the Happy Prince looked so sad that the little swallow was sorry. "It is very cold here," he said. But he agreed to stay with him for one night and be his messenger.

"Thank you, little Swallow," said the Prince.

The swallow picked out the great ruby from the Prince's sword, and flew away with it in his beak over the roofs of the town.

He passed by the cathedral tower, where the white marble angels were sculptured. He passed by the palace and heard the sound of dancing. A beautiful girl came out on the balcony with her lover.

"I hope my dress will be ready in time for the State ball," she said. "I have ordered flowers to be embroidered on it, but the seamstresses are so lazy."

He passed over the river, and saw the lanterns hanging on the masts of the ships. At last he came to the poor woman's house and looked in. The boy was tossing feverishly on his bed, and the mother had fallen asleep, she was so tired. In he hopped, and laid the great ruby on the table beside the woman's thimble. Then he flew gently round the bed, fanning the boy's forehead with his wings. "How cool I feel!" said the boy, "I must be getting better," and he sank into a delicious slumber.

Then the swallow flew back to the Happy Prince, and told him what he had done. "It is curious," he remarked, "but I feel quite warm now, although it is so cold."

"That is because you have done a good action," said the Prince. And the little swallow began to think, and then fell asleep. Thinking always made him sleepy.

When day broke he flew down to the river and had a bath. "Tonight I go to Egypt," said the swallow, and he was in high



spirits at the prospect. He visited all the monuments and sat a long time on top of the church steeple.

When the moon rose he flew back to the Happy Prince.

"Have you any commissions for Egypt?" he cried. "I am just starting."

"Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow," said the Prince, "will you stay with me one night longer?"

"I am waited for in Egypt," answered the swallow.

"Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow," said the Prince, "far away across the city I see a young man in a garret. He is leaning over a desk covered with papers, and in the glass by his side there is a bunch of withered violets. His hair is brown and crisp, and his lips are red as a pomegranate, and he has large and dreamy eyes. He is trying to finish a play for the Director of the Theatre, but he is too cold to write any more. There is no fire in the grate, and hunger has made him faint."

"I will wait with you one night longer," said the swallow, who really had a good heart. He asked if he should take another ruby to the young playwright.

"Alas! I have no ruby now," said the Prince. "My eyes are all that I have left. They are made of rare sapphires, which were





brought out of India a thousand years ago." He ordered the swallow to pluck out one of them and take it to the playwright. "He will sell it to the jeweller, and buy firewood, and finish his play," he said.

"Dear Prince," said the swallow, "I cannot do that," and he began to weep.

"Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow," said the Prince, "do as I command you."

So the swallow plucked out the Prince's eye, and flew away to the young man's garret. It

was easy enough to get in, as there was a hole in the roof. Through this he darted, and came into the room. The young man had his head buried in his hands, so he did not hear the flutter of the bird's wings, and when he looked up he found the beautiful sapphire lying on the withered violets.

"I am beginning to be appreciated," he cried. "This is from some great admirer. Now I can finish my play," and he looked quite happy.

The next day the swallow flew down to the harbour. He sat on the mast of a large vessel and watched the sailors working. "I am going to Egypt," cried the swallow, but nobody minded, and when the moon rose he flew back to the Happy Prince.

"I have come to bid you goodbye," he cried.

"Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow," said the Prince, "will you not stay with me one night longer?"

"It is winter," answered the swallow, "and the snow will soon be here. In Egypt the sun is warm on the green palm trees, and the crocodiles lie in the mud and look lazily about them."

"In the square below," said the Happy Prince, "there stands a little matchgirl. She has let her matches fall in the gutter, and they are all spoiled. Her father will beat her if she does not bring home some money, and she is crying. She has no shoes or

stockings, and her little head is bare. Pluck out my other eye, and give it to her, and her father will not beat her."

"I will stay with you one night longer," said the swallow, "but I cannot pluck out your eye. You would be quite blind then."

"Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow," said the Prince, "do as I command you."

So he plucked out the Prince's other eye, and darted down with it. He swooped past the matchgirl, and slipped the jewel into the palm of her hand.

"What a lovely bit of glass!" cried the little girl; and she ran home, laughing.

Then the swallow came back to the Prince. "You are blind now," he said, "so I will stay with you always."

"No, little Swallow," said the poor Prince, "you must go away to Egypt."

"No, I will stay with you always," said the swallow, and he slept at the Prince's feet.

All the next day he sat on the Prince's shoulder, and told him stories of what he had seen in strange lands.

"Dear little Swallow," said the Prince, "you tell me of marvellous things, but more marvellous than anything is the suffering of men and women. There is no Mystery so great as Misery. Fly over my city, little Swallow, and tell me what you see there."

So the swallow flew over the great city, and saw the rich making merry in their beautiful houses, while the beggars were sitting at the gates. He flew into dark lanes, and saw the white faces of starving children looking out listlessly at the black streets. Under the archway of a bridge two little boys were lying in each other's arms to try and keep themselves warm. "How hungry we are!" they said. "You must not lie here," shouted the watchman, and they wandered out into the rain.

Then he flew back and told the Prince what he had seen.

"I am covered with fine gold," said the Prince. "You must take it off, leaf by leaf, and give it to the poor; the living always think that gold can make them happy."

Leaf after leaf of the fine gold the swallow picked off, till the Happy Prince looked quite dull and grey. Leaf after leaf of the



fine gold he brought to the poor, and the children's faces grew rosier, and they laughed and played in the street. "We have bread now!" they cried.

Then the snow came, and after the snow came the frost. The streets looked as if they were made of silver. Everybody went about in furs, and the little boys wore scarlet caps and skated on the ice.

The poor little swallow grew colder and colder, but he would not leave the Prince, he loved him too well. He picked up crumbs outside the baker's door when the baker was not looking, and tried to keep himself warm by flapping his wings.

But at last he knew that he was going to die. He had just enough strength to fly up to the Prince's shoulder once more. "Goodbye, dear Prince!" he murmured. "Will you let me kiss your hand?

"I am glad that you are going to Egypt at last, little Swallow," said the Prince. "You have stayed too long here but you must kiss me on the lips, for I love you."

"It is not to Egypt that I am going," said the swallow. "I am going to the House of Death. Death is the brother of Sleep, is he not?"

And he kissed the Happy Prince on the lips, and fell down dead at his feet.

At that moment a curious crack sounded inside the statue, as if something had broken. The fact is that the leaden heart had snapped right in two. It certainly was a dreadfully hard frost.

Early the next morning the Mayor was walking in the square below in company with the Town Councillors. As they passed the column he looked up at the statue. "Dear me! How shabby the Happy Prince looks!" he said.

"How shabby, indeed!" cried the Town Councillors, who always agreed with the Mayor and they went up to look at it.

"The ruby has fallen out of his sword, his eyes are gone, and he is golden no longer," said the Mayor. "In fact, he is little better than a beggar!"

"Little better than a beggar," said the Town Councillors.

"And here is actually a dead bird at his feet!" continued the Mayor. "We must really issue a proclamation that birds are not



to be allowed to die here." And the Town Clerk made a note of the suggestion.

So they pulled down the statue of the Happy Prince. "As he is no longer beautiful he is no longer useful," said the Art Professor at the University.

Then they melted the statue in a furnace. "What a strange thing!" said the overseer of the workmen at the foundry. "This broken lead heart will not melt in the furnace. We must throw it away." So they threw it on a dust heap where the dead swallow was also lying.

"Bring me the two most precious things in the city," said God to one of His Angels; and the Angel brought Him the leaden heart and the dead bird.

"You have rightly chosen," said God, "for in my garden of Paradise this little bird shall sing for ever more and in my city of gold the Happy Prince shall praise me."

OSCAR WILDE

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Glossary

seamstress: a woman who makes a living by sewing

thimble: a metal or plastic cap with a closed end, worn to protect the finger and push the needle in sewing



garret: small dark room at the top of the house

THINK ABOUT It

1. Why do the courtiers call the prince 'the Happy Prince'? Is he really happy? What does he see all around him?
2. Why does the Happy Prince send a ruby for the seamstress? What does the swallow do in the seamstress' house?
3. For whom does the prince send the sapphires and why?
4. What does the swallow see when it flies over the city?
5. Why did the swallow not leave the prince and go to Egypt?
6. What are the precious things mentioned in the story? Why are they precious?

TALK ABOUT It

The little swallow says, "It is curious, but I feel quite warm now, although it is so cold." Have you ever had such a feeling? Share your experience with your friends.

SUGGESTED READING

- 'The Selfish Giant' by Oscar Wilde.
- 'How Much Land Does a Man Require?' by Leo Tolstoy