

Summary

Once in a town there lived a prince. He was called the Happy Prince because he had been happy all his life. After his death, his statue was erected on a tall pedestal in the middle of the town. The statue was covered with gold and had two precious sapphire stones embedded in the eyes. A ruby stone had been fitted into the handle of his sword. From there, he could see all around the place and realized that the people lived in a lot of poverty and misery. This sight saddened the prince and being helpless, he would weep to see the plight of his people.

One day a swallow bird was flying through the city, on its way to Egypt to meet its friends. On the way, it took shelter for the night at the feet of the statue of the happy prince. The bird realized that the statue was weeping and upon inquiry, realized the plight of the prince. The helpless prince requested the bird to help it by becoming its messenger. After initial refusal, the bird agreed and took the ruby stone out of the sword hilt and delivered it to a poor seamstress. The next morning, as he went to bid goodbye, the statue convinced him to stay back for one more day. That day, the bird was asked to remove the sapphire stone from one of the statue's eyes and deliver it to a young playwright. Also, on the third day the bird had to pull out the second sapphire stone for a poor match girl. By this time, the weather had become cold and the bird had developed an attachment with the statue. The bird did not want to leave the statue which had now become blind. The happy prince asked the bird to go around the city and inform him the condition of the people living there. The bird told him that the rich were making merry while the poor lived in misery. As the happy prince did not have any more precious stones, he ordered the bird to remove the gold foils from his body and distribute among the living who needed money for survival. Gradually, the statue of the prince lost its covering of gold and became dull and grey. On the other hand, the poor became joyous as they got bread to eat. The swallow bird was now unable to withstand the cold weather and realized that death was approaching. It informed the statue that it had to leave and the statue, who loved the bird asked it to kiss him. As the bird died and fell at the statue's feet, a strange sound came out of the statue - the sound of the breaking of its heart. Although the statue's heart was made of lead, it broke as it was overwhelmed with affection towards the bird. When the statue was melted in the furnace, the heart did not melt and was thrown in the garbage. It landed near the swallow's body. God's angels took both the dead swallow and the broken heart to him as they were the most precious things on land.

Question and Answers

Q1. Why do the courtiers call the prince 'the Happy Prince'? Is he really happy? What does he see all around him?

A. The prince was called the 'Happy Prince' because all his life, he had lived in happiness. After his death, his statue was put up in the middle of the town. From there he could see the plight of the people which made him unhappy. The sight of poor, sad people made him unhappy.

Q2. Why does the Happy Prince send a ruby for the seamstress? What does the swallow do in the seamstress' house?

A. The happy prince saw that the poor seamstress was tired and had no money to look after her ill son. He thought of helping her by sending her the ruby. The swallow placed the ruby stone on the worktable next to the thimble. Then it flew over to the sick child who was uneasy. As his mother had dozed off while working, and the boy was feeling hot, the swallow flapped its wings to give him some air. This comforted the boy and put him to sleep.

Q3. For whom does the prince send the sapphires and why?

Q4. What does the swallow see when it flies over the city?

A. The swallow bird 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 trying to keep themselves warm. They were hungry. They ran away from there when the watchman shouted at them.

Q5. Why did the swallow not leave the prince and go to Egypt?

A. The swallow bird did not leave the prince as it loved him. As the statue was blind, the bird wanted to remain with it.

Q6. What are the precious things mentioned in the story? Why are they precious?

A. The two precious things are the dead swallow bird and the statue's broken heart. According to God, they were precious because in the garden of paradise, the little bird shall sing for ever more and in heaven, the Happy Prince's heart shall praise God.