

THE HAPPY PRINCE

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; his eyes were two sapphires, a large red ruby glowed on his sword hilt.

There came a swallow that had delayed his winter trip and on his hurried way happened to put up for the night between the feet of the statue.

The swallow discovered that the Prince was weeping at the sight of the poverty and misery of the poor people in his city. The swallow was persuaded to stay long enough – too long into the winter – to help the Prince literally give of himself as he distributed riches to the poor.

First, the swallow took the ruby to a mother tending a sick child. Then the swallow carried one sapphire eye to a starving writer in a cold attic. The other sapphire eye was flown to a little homeless girl.

Then, one by one, the swallow carried all the leaves of gold that covered the Prince's body to give aid to undernourished, emaciated children.

Now the Prince had given himself away. In the cold of the winter, his leaden heart cracked. So too did the swallow die in the cold.

'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 of the Prince and the dead bird.