



The Happy Prince

The statue of the Happy Prince stood high above the city. It was covered with gold, its eyes were bright blue jewels, and a red jewel hung from its waist. Everyone thought that it was very beautiful.

‘Why aren’t you like the Happy Prince?’ mothers said to their little boys when they cried.

Sad men looked at the statue and said, ‘I am glad that someone in the world is happy.’

One night a little bird flew alone over the city. The other birds were all in Egypt now. ‘Where can I stay tonight?’ he thought. Then he saw the statue. ‘I will stay there,’ he thought. ‘It is high up, so there is plenty of fresh air.’

He landed between the feet of the Happy Prince. ‘I have a golden bedroom!’ he thought. But as he put his head under his wing, a large drop of water fell on him.

He looked up. ‘That is very strange!’ he thought. ‘There is not a cloud in the sky, but it is raining!’

Then another drop fell. ‘I cannot stay on a statue that does not keep me dry,’ he thought. ‘I must find another place.’ And he decided to fly away. But as he opened his wings, a third drop fell. He looked up and saw — Ah! What did he see?

The eyes of the Happy Prince were full of tears. Tears ran down his golden face. The face was very beautiful in the moonlight, and the bird felt sorry for him.

‘Who are you?’ asked the bird.

‘I am the Happy Prince.’

‘Then why are you crying? I am wet with your tears.’

‘When I was alive,’ said the prince, ‘I had a heart like every other man. But I did not know what tears were. I lived in a palace where there was no sadness. In the daytime I played with my friends in a beautiful garden, and in the evening I danced. There was a high wall round the garden. But I did not know what lay on the other side. So I was called the Happy Prince. I was pleased with my little world. Now I am dead, and they have put me up here. I can see all the unhappiness of my city. My heart now is made of a cheap metal. But even that poor heart can feel, and so I cry.’

‘Oh,’ said the bird to himself, ‘he is not all gold — he is only gold on the outside.’

‘Far away from here,’ said the Happy Prince in a low voice, ‘there is a poor house in a little street. Through an open window, I can see a woman at a table. Her face is very thin and she has rough, red hands. She is making a dress for one of the queen’s ladies, for a dance in the palace. Her little boy is lying on a bed in the corner of the room. He is very ill. He is crying because she can only give him water from the river. Little bird, will you take my red jewel to her? I cannot move from here.’

‘My friends are waiting for me in Egypt,’ said the bird.

‘Little bird, little bird,’ said the prince, ‘please stay with me for one night and do this for me. The boy is crying and his mother is so unhappy.’

The Happy Prince looked very sad, and the little bird was sorry for him. ‘It is very cold here,’ he said, ‘but I will stay with you for one night. Tomorrow I will take the jewel.’

‘Thank you, little bird,’ said the prince.

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So the bird took the great red jewel from the prince’s waist and flew away with it over the roofs of the town. He passed the palace and heard the sound of dancing. A beautiful girl -was at a window with her lover. ‘I hope my dress will be ready for the dance next week,’ she said.’ Those women are so lazy.’

The bird passed over the river and flew and flew. At last he came to the poor little house and looked inside. The boy was lying on the bed. The mother was asleep; she was so tired. He flew in and put the great red jewel on the table. Then he flew round the bed, moving the air around the boy’s face with his wings.

‘Oh,’ said the boy, ‘my face does not feel so hot. I think I am getting better.’ And he fell asleep.

Then the bird flew back to the Happy Prince. ‘It is strange,’ the bird said. ‘It is very cold, but I feel quite warm.’

‘That is because you have done a good thing,’ said the prince. The little bird fell asleep.

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When day came, the bird flew down to the river for a bath. A clever man saw him. ‘That is very unusual!’ he said. ‘That kind of bird, here in winter! I must write that down!’

‘I will go to Egypt tonight,’ thought the bird.

When the moon came up, he flew back to the Happy Prince. 'Can I do anything for you in Egypt?' he said.

'Little bird, little bird,' said the prince, 'please will you stay with me for one more night?'

'My friends are waiting for me,' answered the bird.

'Far away across the city,' said the prince, 'I can see a young writer in a little room at the top of a house. He is sitting at a table that is covered with papers. At his side there are some dead flowers. He is trying to finish a story. But he is very cold and he cannot write. There is no fire in the room, and he is weak and hungry.'

'I will wait with you for one more night,' said the bird kindly. 'What shall I take to him?'

'Take him one of my eyes,' said the prince. 'They are made of beautiful blue stones from India. The young man can sell it and buy wood and food. He can finish his story.'

'Take out your eye, dear prince?' said the bird. 'I cannot do that!' And he began to cry.

'Do it!' said the prince.

So the bird took out the prince's eye and flew away to the young man's room. It was easy to get in because there was a hole in the roof. The young man was sitting with his head in his hands, so he did not hear the bird's wings. When he looked up, a beautiful blue jewel was lying on the dead flowers.

'Someone likes my stories!' he cried happily. 'This is a gift from someone who has read my books. Now I can finish writing this story!'

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On the next day the bird flew down to the river. He watched the seamen working on the ships. 'I am going to Egypt!' he cried, but no one listened to him.

When the moon came up, he flew back to the Happy Prince. 'I have come to say goodbye to you,' he said.

'Little bird, little bird,' said the prince, 'please will you stay with me for one more night?'

'It is winter,' answered the bird. 'The snow will soon come. In Egypt the sun is warm and the trees are green. Dear prince, I must leave you; but I will never forget you.'

'A little girl is standing there in the square below. She is selling eggs. Her eggs have fallen on the ground and they are broken. She has no money to take home. Her father will hit her. Take out my other eye and give it to her.'

'I will stay with you for one more night,' said the bird, 'but I cannot take out your other eye. You will not be able to see!'

'Do it!' said the prince.

So the bird took out the prince's other eye and flew down with it. He flew to the girl and put the jewel

in her hand.

‘This is a beautiful piece of glass!’ cried the little girl. She ran home, laughing.

Then the bird flew back to the prince. ‘You cannot see now,’ he said, ‘so I will stay with you.’

‘No,’ said the poor prince, ‘you must go to Egypt.’

‘I will stay with you,’ repeated the bird, and he slept at the prince’s feet.

The next day he stayed with the prince. He told the prince stories about the strange lands that he knew.

‘Dear little bird,’ said the prince, ‘you are telling me about strange and wonderful things, but the suffering of men and women is stranger than anything. Fly over my city, little bird. Tell me what you see there.’

So the swallow flew over the great city. He saw the rich eating and drinking in their beautiful houses. He saw the poor people sitting at the gate. He flew into the dark streets and saw the white faces of hungry children with sad eyes. Under a bridge, two little boys were lying close together to keep warm. ‘We are so hungry!’ they said. ‘You cannot lie there!’ shouted a guard.

Then the bird flew back and told the prince.

‘I am covered with fine gold,’ said the prince. ‘Take it off, piece by piece, and give it to my poor people.’

The bird pulled off the gold, until the Happy Prince looked grey and ugly. The bird took the gold to the poor, and the children’s faces became brighter. ‘We have bread now!’ they cried.

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Then the snow came. Ice followed the snow, and hung down from the roofs of the houses. Everyone wore thick coats.

The little bird became colder. He did not leave the prince, because he loved him too much. But he was dying.

‘Goodbye, dear prince!’ he said. ‘Can I kiss you?’

‘I am glad that you are going to Egypt,’ said the prince. ‘You have stayed too long. Kiss me, because I love you.’

‘I am not going to Egypt,’ said the bird. ‘I am going to the House of Death.’ He kissed the prince, and fell down dead at his feet. Then there was a strange sound inside the statue. CRACK — the metal heart broke into two pieces.

Early next morning, an important man in the city was walking below with two of his friends. He looked up at the statue. ‘The Happy Prince does not look very bright!’ he said. ‘The red stone has disappeared, his eyes are not there, and he is not golden. He looks like a beggar.’

‘Yes he does!’ said the man’s friends.

‘Here is a dead bird at his feet!’ said the officer. ‘We must make an order that birds cannot die here.’

They pulled down the statue of the Happy Prince and put it in the fire. A stream of bright metal ran out.

‘This is strange!’ said the workmen. ‘This broken piece in the middle of the statue has stayed hard. We must throw it away.’ So they threw it away with the dead bird.

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God said to his servants, Bring me the two best things in the city.’ They brought Him the broken heart and the dead bird.

‘Yes, you have brought the right things,’ God said. ‘This little bird will sing for ever in my garden, and the Happy Prince will stand in my city of gold.’



Oscar Wilde
The young King and other stories
Essex, Penguin Books, 2000