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***ELEGY FOR A PRINCE*, Opera in Two Acts (2005)**

Music Sergio Cervetti

Libretto Elizabeth Esris

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The Prince learns the value of life too late and a young vagabond, Swallow, dreams of returning home. Their lives intersect in this opera rooted in a story by Oscar Wilde, *The Happy Prince*. Premiered by New York City Opera/VOX 2007 in a concert performance of three scenes performed on May 12, 2007 at New York University's Skirball Center, New York City.

SYNOPSIS

Imagination, humor, cynicism, sorrow and love intertwine in *Elegy For A Prince*, a bittersweet musical journey that resonates with life. It places Oscar Wilde's story, *The Happy Prince*, within an original framework that begins with the Father reading the fairy tale to his Son. As in the original story, the Prince seeks to alleviate the suffering that he ignored while he was alive in Sans Souci. Swallow is a young vagabond of exotic origins who stumbles into town and becomes the Prince's agent to the Poor. Together they fulfill the Prince's mission. In the process, Swallow develops compassion for humanity. He learns from the Prince that love is the divine secret, as expressed in the second act in a farewell duet that borrows from Wilde's discourse on love in *De Profundis*. The opera ends with one of the characters from the original tale, the Young Writer, emerging as a champion of compassion and beauty in a cynical world who comes to realize that "If the world is built of sorrow, it was built with hands of love."

INSTRUMENTATION

1 piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 1 English Horn, 1 E-flat clarinet, 2 B-flat clarinets, 1 bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 1 contrabassoon, 4 french horns, 3 trumpets in B-flat, 2 tenor trombones, 1 bass trombone, 1 B-flat tuba, 2 harps; strings; piano, celesta, percussion: 4 timpani, 1 bass drum, 1 snare drum, 1 glockenspiel, 1 marimba, 1 xylophone, 1 triangle-7 inch, 3 timbales, 1 suspended cymbal, 1 ratchet, gran cassa, 2 anvils low & high pitched, tubular bells, 1 tam-tam, 1 tambourine, guiro, claves, piece of glass-20x16-placed on hollow wooden box to be broken with mallet.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Prince (dramatic tenor/baritone martin)

Despairs that he failed for so long to see the suffering of humanity. To the audience a human figure of a Prince; to the Townspeople, a richly gilded statue.

Swallow (lyric soprano)

Confident and innocent; to the audience an imaginative young vagabond in exotic garb who reluctantly becomes an extension of the Prince in helping to ease suffering in the Town. In the eyes of the Townspeople in the fairy tale, a Swallow who flies about the Town.

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Father (bass baritone)

Loving Father reading to his Son; might be Oscar Wilde.

Son (boy soprano)

School age innocent; wants the story to have a happy ending.

Mayor (bass)

Conduit from the fairy tale to reality; caustic, charming, shrewd, sarcastic; both narrator and character in the tale.

Sick Boy (boy soprano)

Small boy sick with fever; first of the Poor to be helped by the Prince and Swallow.

Boy's Mother (mezzo-soprano)
Seamstress to the Rich; despondent because she cannot provide for her Son.

Lover (tenor)
Young man in love' speaks his heart in the night.

Beautiful Girl of the Palace (mezzo-soprano)
Vain, selfish; ignores heartfelt words of her lover.

Young Writer (tenor)
20's; starving Bohemian; passionate writer; too cold and weak to complete his play.

Professor of Ornithology (tenor, nasal as in Goro)
Ivory-tower academic; comical in his observations of Swallow.

Sparrows (sopranos)
Excited birds' impressed that a swallow has come to Town.

Match-Girl (lyric soprano)
Young innocent dreamer; cold, tired, fearful of being beaten by her father.

Older Brother (boy soprano)
Teenager' desperate, caring for Younger Brother in the streets.

Younger Brother (boy soprano)
Young child; maintains the innocence and ability to dream that his brother has lost.

Town Councillors (3, two tenors, one bass)
Railing pompous bureaucrats—opinions sway with the prevailing wind; accompany the Mayor.

Overseer (bass)
Everyman; hard worker; ambivalent about his job to melt the Prince's lead heart; feels loyalty to the Prince but moves on when self-doubt starts to interfere with his peace of mind.

CHORUS/SECONDARY CHARACTERS

Disappointed Man (bass baritone)
World weary; no illusions.

School Children (children's voices)
Happy, playful, colorful dreamers; punctuate the story as reminders of innocence.

Mathematical Master (bass baritone)
Scornful of imagination; a petty tyrant.

Sensible Mother (mezzo soprano)
Didactic, busy, scornful.

Townspeople (soprano, alto, tenor, bass)
Voices from the Town.

Sailors (tenors & basses)
Voices from the docks.

Voices of the Rich/Voices of the Poor (soprano, alto, tenor, bass)
Archetypes of the extremes of society.

Watchman (bass)
Civil servant blindly doing his job; unmoved by suffering.

OVERVIEW

They are human beings. The Prince learns the value of life too late and a young vagabond, Swallow, dreams of returning to his home. Each is compelled by the world and changed by the other.

Elegy For A Prince is rooted in Oscar Wilde's fairy tale, *The Happy Prince*. It brings to life the original characters from the story—a statue of the Prince and a swallow—but gives them human dimension. From the outset, the audience takes a leap of faith. There is a suggestion of a statue on the stage, but from his first lines the Prince is a human figure deeply moved by the misery he sees. He pursues his goal to alleviate suffering in the Town and he grows to love Swallow. Swallow says he is “flying south” to meet his friends at home in Egypt. To the Professor of Ornithology he is rare, a “swallow in winter!” But as he interacts with the Prince and becomes his agent to the Poor, Swallow appears to the audience as a young vagabond of exotic origins. In the beginning of Act I the Mayor suggests that Swallow is an “an illusion” and rhetorically asks if he is a bird or a boy, and adds he's definitely a “thief!” From that point on, the little figure moving about the Town is both.

The opera begins with the Father—Oscar Wilde perhaps—lovingly reading *The Happy Prince* to his Son. It begins as all fairy tales do by recalling a time that is no more—“a time of palaces and princes...when a Swallow loved a Reed and longed for yellow lions on the Nile.” A time, the Father says, when a golden statue stood above a city “a gilded likeness of the Happy Prince.” The Father is interrupted by the caustic Mayor of the Town who announces the dark reality—The Happy Prince is dead, “just a memory.” The Mayor then invites the audience into his city where the tale comes to life. (Fugato)

Elegy For A Prince uses Wilde's tale to echo reality within the magic of story. Swallow is a vagabond, a Bedouin youth who by the nature of his clothes and skin is suspect. He is a drifter with dreams, invisible to the cynical world. The Prince is a man lost and redeemed—and in his redemption deemed worthless by the Mayor and Town. Narrative themes of innocence, promise, comic foibles, and compassion are mirrored by musical motifs that create character and conjure story.

In Act II, when the opera eventually returns to the Father reading the conclusion of the story to his Son, *Elegy For A Prince* continues to unfold beyond the pages of the book. In the final scene of Act II, a number of references from Wilde's discourse on love in *De Profundis** heard earlier in the farewell duet between the Prince and Swallow, affirm the importance of "little silent acts of love." This time they are sung by the Young Writer who has learned "If the world is built of sorrow, it was built with hands of love." He has prospered from the goodwill of the Prince and Swallow, who lie dead in the Town's dust-heap, and is now heir to their spirit. He walks toward the Town's theater during the final orchestral tutti that swells with the Prince's motifs of love and death entwined. It quickly subsides while Swallow's theme—taken this time by clarinets and oboes—emerges wistfully and triumphantly, bringing the opera to its bittersweet end.

Elegy For A Prince when described as a "Lyric Metaphor" is best understood in the character of Swallow. As bird he is innocent, fragile, and no match for the harsh winter that bears down upon him. As vagabond—a drifter with beautiful dreams but no chance of attaining them—he is invisible to the cynical world. Both identities mirror truths that seem eternally rooted in human existence. Likewise, the Prince is suggestive of the best and worst in mankind. As Prince of Sans Souci he sought nothing but the satisfaction of his own desires. In his second "life" as a statue, now wise but helpless, he recognizes the misery of the world and the way in which one person can change the lives of those who suffer. Metaphor weaves its way throughout *Elegy For A Prince* in both character and setting. Mankind's imperfect struggle for fulfillment can be seen in the schism between rich and poor, the clash of dreamer and cynic, and the contrast of humanity and symbol.

*Lines and paraphrases of lines from *De Profundis* are taken from the 1949 edition of *De Profundis, The Complete Text*, with an introduction by Vyvyan Holland, Oscar Wilde's son.

NOTES ON CHARACTERS

SWALLOW, PRINCE, YOUNG WRITER, MATCH-GIRL, FATHER, MAYOR

SWALLOW (soprano)

From the beginning of *Elegy For a Prince*, the character of Swallow (soprano) has two identities. As in the story by Oscar Wilde, he is seen by most of the Townspeople as a swallow, who is passing through the Town on his way to his home in Egypt before the onslaught of winter. Like the Prince, however, he is seen by the audience as a human figure—a young boy, a vagabond of exotic origins, a dreamer who is drifting through the Town musing of a beautiful far away world. He becomes attached to the Prince, works to help him alleviate the suffering of the poor, and learns from him the importance of compassion and love. As suggested by the cynical Mayor in the first scene, even some of the Townspeople question Swallow's identity—"A bird? A boy?" When it is discovered that the ruby is missing from the Prince's sword, some Townspeople report seeing a strange youth in the Town—"a swarthy little prowler in the night." The thief who steals the statue's jewels?

Swallow's ambiguity is important. In his innocence, in his capacity to dream, and his invisibility as an individual, Swallow represents those who are marginalized by society. He has youth, optimism, and aspirations, but he is adrift in the world and becomes its victim. In his relationship with the Prince, however, he discovers his own humanity and the secret of life, which the Prince tells him is love. They are bound together always through their charitable gestures and their discovery of each other's worth.

PRINCE (baritone)

The statue of the Happy Prince is significant in the original story and in the opera. In *Elegy For A Prince* however, the physical presence of a looming, immovable statue that speaks is less important than the projection of genuine humanity from the character of the Prince. The concept for staging the character is that a gilded body, covered in gold leaf should be suggested on the stage; however, when the Prince interacts with Swallow, he emerges like a spirit from the statue conveying emotion with his body as well as his voice. This spirit is a man.

The intent of giving movement to the statue is to underscore the Prince as a dynamic, complex character and not just a voice of sorrow and regret. He is a living soul who finds the opportunity to assuage personal guilt by employing Swallow to do good deeds, but he also comes to love his helper. He is the master teacher of Swallow, instructing him in the harshest realities of life and the meaning of compassion and love. That the Prince was one of the "Voices of the Rich" while he lived makes his

understanding of misery more acute. It also makes the debasement of his formerly golden body, by the Mayor and Town Councillors in Act II, all the more ironic and cruel. Most importantly, however, he is a character who loves and is loved.

After the Prince has done all he can for the needy of the Town and Swallow dies from cold and hunger, his heart breaks, he “dies” again, and the heart is thrown in the dust-heap by the foundry’s Overseer when it will not melt down. In Wilde’s original version of *The Happy Prince* as read by the Father, his heart and Swallow are taken by angels to Paradise. True peace comes to the Prince, however, when *Elegy For A Prince* moves beyond the original fairy tale and the actions of the Young Writer in the final scene of the opera mirror the compassion of the Prince.

YOUNG WRITER (tenor)

The Young Writer emerges at the conclusion of the opera as a defined individual and not just the stock image of a Bohemian. It is he who takes up the benevolent work of the Prince by recognizing the goodness in the actions of the little Match-Girl and by understanding that the rightful place of the Prince’s heart is next to Swallow’s body. He picks up the broken heart from the dust-heap and places it lovingly next to the body of Swallow in what has become, through the kindness of the March-Girl, a flower-filled meadow. The Young Writer realizes that while there will be no fairy tale endings here—no characters risen from the dead—there is beauty as well as sorrow in the real world. The Young Writer’s insight into humanity suggests a worthy heir to the Prince who “heard the words within his heart” and gave him a chance to fulfill his promise.

Earlier, in Act I, the cold and starving Young Writer despairs that he will never have the means and strength to complete his play. The Prince has Swallow bring the Young Writer one of his sapphire eyes to help make his dream a reality. Although the Young Writer does not know who his benefactor is, something in the sight of the Prince’s heart and Swallow’s body in the dust-heap in the opera’s final scene touches him deeply, and reminds him of how his life was changed by a gesture of goodwill. Now the Young Writer’s own eyes recognize the importance of individual acts of kindness. He now possesses in his youth the wisdom the Prince never had when he lived and lorded over Sans Souci.

MATCH-GIRL (lyric soprano)

In the final scene of *Elegy For A Prince* the Match-Girl is selling flowers in the glorious sun of a spring day. She is ingenuous and full of compassion when she sees the body of Swallow. She feels pity and places one of her bouquets next to Swallow’s body. The Young Writer witnesses her kindness and gives her a piece of gold to compensate for the flowers. She dances away with the gold in her hand singing about the “little Swallow fallen from the sky.” Her generosity and good deed compel the Young Writer to marvel at her “lovely, little silent act of love.”

Earlier in the opera, Act I, it is winter and the little Match-Girl selling her matches is “sorrow standing in the square.” She has dropped the matches in the wet gutter and a beating awaits her at home. The Prince sends Swallow to give her the last of his sapphire eyes. When Swallow puts the sapphire in her hand, she dances about holding it as a “lovely bit of glass...a star fallen from the sky.” Her dance and words in the opera’s final act—“Little Swallow fallen from heaven”—echo her ingenuous dance into the night from Act I’s scene.

FATHER (bass baritone)

Elegy For A Prince opens with the warmth and comfort of the Father reading to his Son. It could be Oscar Wilde. As the Father starts to tell the tale, his loving voice is interrupted by the harsh voice of the Mayor of the Town who announces that “The Happy Prince is just a memory!” At this point the story is pulled into the Town and characters of the tale itself. (Fugato)

The Father is the conduit from reality to fairy tale and back to reality at the end of the opera. When the opera is almost over, the Father and Son are seen again about to read the last page of the fairy tale. It is here that we see them in a genuine intimate exchange. The Son feels the fear and anxiety of a story that ends with death, and the Father knows the helplessness of revealing truth to a child. The Father longs to maintain the innocence of childhood for his Son and aches for its loss. The Father’s frustration parallels that of the Prince who is unable to help the Poor of the Town on his own because, as a statue, he is immobile. As the Prince is bound to stone, the Father is bound to reality and truth: the words on the last page of the Father’s book are the true ending of the fairy tale as written. He knows it will disappoint and disturb the child’s assumption of “happily ever after.” The Father’s dilemma is one shared by all parents—and by the Prince, who knows that Swallow had to learn about the suffering of mankind in order to understand life.

MAYOR (bass)

The Father’s story is interrupted by a harsh voice. It is the Mayor from the Town in the fairy tale that the Father is reading. The Mayor jolts the audience by announcing that “The Happy Prince is just a memory.” The action pulls away from the Father and Son and into the fantasy of the tale. He reveals that the happiness the Prince knew when he was alive in Sans Souci is past and that “men ignore the misery around them.” Conscious of his harsh tone, he switches to a more charming voice and invites the

audience to enter the Town to “witness the tale.” He begins to merge into the crowd but hesitates to turn again to the audience. In a charged emotional aside—bombastic once more—he blurts out that the Swallow is an illusion—a vagabond in reality. He asks rhetorically if it is “A bird? A boy?” Regardless a thief.

The Mayor is seen periodically throughout the opera as both narrator and character. Although he tries to endear himself to the audience, he is ultimately revealed as a cruel, cynical figure, a hint of which can be seen in his sardonic comments about the Prince and Swallow in Act I, Scene 1.

MUSICAL BREAKDOWN BY SCENE

ACT I

Prelude

Scene 1. It was a time, my son, of palaces and princes. (Father, Son)

The Happy Prince is just a memory! (Mayor)

Fugato.

Welcome. (Mayor)

He’s as beautiful as a weathercock! (Town Councillors, Disappointed Man, School Children, Mathematical Master,

Sensible Mother, Voices of Rich/Poor)

Scene 2. All day I have been flying. (Swallow)

My Reed is so far away. (Swallow)

I am The Happy Prince. (Prince, Swallow)

Far away in the city is a poor house. (Prince)

Swallow, little Swallow. (Prince)

I’m waited for in Egypt. (Swallow)

I don’t think I like little boys! (Swallow)

Swallow, little Swallow/It is cold here. (Prince, Swallow)

Scene 3. Look how brilliantly stars adorn the night. (Lover, Beautiful Girl, Voices of Rich/Poor, Mayor.)

Mama, how cool I feel—how cool! (Sick Boy, Mother)

It is curious. (Swallow, Prince)

Scene 4. A remarkable phenomenon. (Professor of Ornithology, Swallow)

Stolen! Gone! Vanished! (Town Councillors, Mathematical Master, Disappointed Man, Sensible Mother, Mayor,

Townspeople)

What a distinguished stranger. (Sparrows, School Children, Professor of Ornithology)

Scene 5. Good Evening, Happy Prince. (Swallow)

Swallow, little Swallow. (Prince)

Alas, alas, I have no ruby now, gentle Swallow. (Prince, Swallow)

Scene 6. What a miracle is this? (Young Writer, Prince)

Scene 7. Heave a-hoy, heave a-hoy. (Sailors)

Summer seems so very long ago. (Swallow, Sailors)

Scene 8. I come to say good-bye. (Swallow, Prince)

Sorrow is standing in the square. (Prince, Swallow)

It is winter and the snow will soon be here. (Swallow, Prince)

What a lovely bit of glass. (Match-Girl)

Scene 9. Your jewel gave hope to the Match-Girl. (Swallow, Prince)

ACT II

Prelude

Scene 1. Dawn blushes red against the sky. (Swallow, Prince)

There are lands beyond this city. (Swallow, Prince)

Scene 2. Rich and richer in ivory mansions. (Voices of the Rich/Poor)

I am cold, Brother, hold me close. (Younger Brother, Older Brother, Watchman)

Scene 3. Cries of hungry brothers/Fathers steal to feed their children. (Swallow, Prince)

That Swallow gave me gold. (Older Brother, Younger Brother)

Gold is falling from the sky! (Voices of the Poor)

Scene 4. It is the dead of winter. (Mayor, Swallow, Young Writer)

Scene 5. The Match-Girl/There is suffering. (Swallow, Prince)

The memory of your little, silent acts of love. (Prince)

Scene 6. Look--how shabby is the statue of the Prince! (Mayor, Town Councillors)

The statue of the Prince must come down! (Mayor, Town Councillors)

Scene 7. How strange. (Overseer)

Scene 8. The heart lay on the dust-heap near the Swallow. (Father)

The Swallow isn’t really dead; is he, Papa? (Son, Father)

The words say. (Father, Son)

Scene 9. Oranges, Mama! (Sick Boy, Boy's Mother)
Look! Over there—the Young Writer. (Love, Beautiful Girl)
Come along, hurry up, to the palace. (Older Brother, Younger Brother)
What a lovely, little silent act of love. (Young Writer, Match-Girl)
She made the dust-heap a garden filled with beauty. (Young Writer)

CURTAIN

SCENE SYNOPSIS AND LYRICS FOR THREE MUSICAL SELECTIONS

ACT II. Scene 1.

Dawn blushes red against the sky (Swallow, Prince).

SYNOPSIS

It is morning. By now the sky is red and warns of a storm. Swallow stirs, feels the chill in the air, and looks at the empty eyes of the Prince with compassion tempered by innocence. With the help of Swallow, a young vagabond who met the Prince while stopping to rest on his way home to Egypt, the Prince has given away his ruby and sapphire eyes in order to help the Sick Boy, the Young Writer, and the Match-Girl. Swallow, alternately seen by the Townspeople as “a swarthy little prowler in the night” or as a bird, has resolved to stay with the Prince and be his eyes even though it means certain death from the cold of winter. With mature dignity Swallow attempts to cheer him with stories of the world he has relinquished. “I will be your eyes” he sings, despite the Prince’s plea that he return home before winter. Swallow comforts the Prince with stories about Egypt, the world that he knows “where the sun begins its journey.” The Prince appreciates Swallow’s effort but sings, “No mystery is so great as misery” urging Swallow to go into the Town and witness the suffering. Comparing himself to the Sphinx, “still and silent, bound in time,” the Prince mourns that he is “braced forever, doomed to witness, helpless to respond.” He reflects that when he had eyes, he was blind to the suffering that surrounded him. He tells Swallow that he must go into the city in order to “know what I know.”

LYRICS - ACT II. Scene 1.

Dawn blushes red against the sky (Swallow, Prince).

SWALLOW

Describing what the Prince cannot see.

Dawn blushes red against the sky, the city sleeps till it's light.

I know where the sun begins its journey, where every hour shimmers in its heat.

PRINCE

Where is that place, little Swallow?

SWALLOW

Like a dear friend, as if giving sight to the blind Prince with his stories.

There are lands beyond this city, strange and lovely lands I've seen, ibis stand along the Nile, gold fish glitter in the sun.

Nomads cross the fiery sands.

Green snakes coil in a palm

In the desert lives the Sphinx who sees all mysteries of the land.

PRINCE

You paint wonders with your words, but the Sphinx has eyes of stone.

Still and silent, bound in time.

Greater than marvels is the suffering.

I was blind!

Like the Sphinx I'm braced forever, doomed to witness; helpless to respond.

Doomed to witness; helpless to respond.

This has been a moment of suspended joy for Swallow and the Prince, but the awful reality of the city, which drives his consciousness, returns to the Prince. With a growing sense of urgency he charges Swallow to see for himself how the Rich and Poor live.

PRINCE

*Can princes laugh while paupers cry?
Is there suffering in this world?
Does cruelty live in the heart of man?
No mystery is so great as misery.
You must know what I know.
Fly over my city, little Swallow.
Go, and tell me what you see.*

It is raining. Swallow moves about the Town and sees the Rich making merry in their beautiful mansions while beggars sit at their gates. The Rich laugh at the Poor. He goes into dark lanes where the white faces of starving children look listlessly into black alleys. For the first time Swallow hears the Voices of the Rich and the Voices of the Poor.

END of ACT II. Scene 1.

ACT II. Scene 5.

The Match-Girl (Swallow, Prince).

SYNOPSIS

Swallow finds the strength to move close to the Prince for the last time. He is weak and near death, but he still maintains his dignity. He has seen reality and life, and longs for more understanding. He feels great love for the Prince who has brought humanity and love into his heart. Their bodies seem almost as one. Swallow asks "What is the secret of life?" The Prince replies that there is suffering and that "Love can read the writing on a distant star." The Prince and Swallow illuminate the strength and beauty that love brings to the world. Swallow kisses the Prince before he dies. In his final words, the Prince, fulfilled by the good he has been able to do with the help of Swallow, declares "You have brought me to a garden filled with beauty; your desert sands blossom like a rose." He too dies.

LYRICS - ACT II. Scene 5.

The Match-Girl (Swallow, Prince).

SWALLOW

Swallow finds the strength to move close to the Prince for the last time. He is ragged, weak, lethargic in his movements, but he still has a sense of dignity. He has seen reality and life and he longs for more understanding. He feels great love for the Prince. Their bodies almost seem as one.

The Match-Girl, the Young Writer, the boy who cried for oranges: I know their sorrow.

The hungry Brothers by the river.

What is the secret of life?

PRINCE

There is suffering, a wound that bleeds when touched by any hand, but love.

There is love.

Eternal spring of life, dawning of joy!

Love can read the writing on a distant star.

SWALLOW

With love stars warm the winter night.

PRINCE

With love we're wiser than we know.

SWALLOW

We're freer than we dream.

PRINCE

We're nobler than we are.

SWALLOW

With love we cherish life.

PRINCE

Love is the divine secret.

SWALLOW and PRINCE

Love is the divine secret.

SWALLOW

I must keep love in my heart.

PRINCE

And the memory of the sweetness that is life.

SWALLOW

*The music of daybreak; the silence of night.
The memory of you, dearest Prince.*

PRINCE

Our lives are entwined forever, little Swallow.

SWALLOW

*But love and death walk together.
I feel them both.*

PRINCE

Love is eternal.

SWALLOW

*It lives in my heart.
Good-bye, my Prince;
Will you let me kiss your hand?*

PRINCE

Blind. Hears the weak voice of Swallow but cannot see the frail, suffering body. He tenderly musters the will to bid farewell to this beloved Swallow who he thinks will fly to Egypt and the sun.

I am glad you got Egypt, at last, with the wing of the wind, to your home.

You have stayed too long.

The shadow of your goodness will remain.

You must kiss me on the lips, for I love you.

SWALLOW

*It is not to Egypt that I go.
Our love is more radiant than its sun.
I'm going to the House of Death.
Death is the brother of Sleep, dear Prince.
With love, I am not afraid.*

Swallow kisses the Prince on the lips and falls dead at his feet. The Prince feels the kiss, and the fall of Swallow. He knows that Swallow is dead. He feels tremors within the dull gray metal that is his body.

PRINCE

The memory of your little, silent acts of love unseal the sorrow in my heart.

You have brought me to a garden filled with beauty; your desert sands blossom like a rose.

Love and death walk together for us both.

At that moment a curious crack sounds inside the statue, as if something great has broken. His leaden heart cracks and the Prince “dies” again. The night is silent and still.

END of ACT II. Scene 5.

ACT II. Scene 9, last half of final scene.

What a lovely, little, silent act of love (Match-Girl, Young Writer).

SYNOPSIS

Spring. The tale has ended. The Town is alive. Swallow has died from the harsh winter, however, and the statue of the Prince has been dismantled, scorned as “a worthless ruin.” Swallow’s body and the leaden heart of the Prince lie in the dust-heap surrounded by the Town’s refuse. Trees are budding; the sky suggests the light of longer days; familiar faces with a sense of renewal are visible. Those characters helped by the Prince and Swallow prosper. The Match-Girl is selling flowers, and sees the body of Swallow in the dust-heap and feels pity. She places a bouquet next to Swallow’s body. The Young Writer sees her kind act as he walks past and on to the theater for the premiere of his play “about the Prince who was a statue and his soulmate little Swallow.” He is “the talk of the town.” The Young Writer observes her “lovely, little silent act of love” and is deeply moved. She dances and sings about the “little Swallow fallen from the sky” guided by a gold coin given to her by the Young Writer who watches her imaginative joy. He starts to walk on, but is drawn back to the dust-heap which seems transformed. He marvels that the little Match-Girl’s kindness made it “a garden filled with beauty.” Kneeling down near Swallow, the Young Writer picks up the broken heart of the Prince. He is deeply touched, and he remembers his own words when he first found the sapphire in his garret which changed his life, “someone hears the words within my heart.” He starts to walk away with the Prince’s heart, which he does not want leave with the refuse. Thinking again, he changes his mind. The heart of the Prince compels him, and he knows it belongs with Swallow. Seeing the heart and Swallow amidst flowers and refuse, the Young Writer understands that life is bittersweet. He now possesses the wisdom the Prince never had while alive. Heading toward the theater, he turns to remind the audience that “If the world is built of sorrow, it was built with hands of love.”

LYRICS - ACT II. Scene 9, last half of final scene.

The Little Match-Girl looks in the dump and sees the body of Swallow. She feels pity and places one of her bouquets next to Swallow. The Young Writer walks by, his manuscript in hand, and sees her kind gesture.

YOUNG WRITER

To himself.

What a lovely, little silent act of love!

To the Match-Girl. Gives her a gold coin.

Let me pay you for your flowers, little helper.

Never lose your gentle sweetness, that is life!

MATCH-GIRL

To the Young Writer, pointing to Swallow.

It’s a little Swallow, fallen from heaven!

She dances away guided by the shiny piece of gold in her hand. She drops her remaining flowers.

...a little Swallow fallen from the sky!

...Swallow, little Swallow, little Swallow.

...fallen from heaven!

YOUNG WRITER

Awed by what he sees.

She made the dust-heap a garden filled with beauty.

He takes the flowers she dropped and puts them next to Swallow. Other flowers and swaying reeds have pushed up through the refuse. The space looks more like a meadow.

What miracle is this? What happiness is here?

The Young Writer sees the broken heart. He kneels on one knee, puts his manuscript on the ground near Swallow, reaches to touch the heart and retracts gently. He reaches again and picks it up. He brushes it off and cannot put it down. It is as if he recognizes the heart.

Someone hears the words within my heart.

The Young Writer considers taking the heart with him. He starts to rise. Thinking again he places it next to Swallow among the flowers which adorn the refuse, the earth, the evening itself. Understanding stirs within him.

Little silent acts of love, tales of sorrow and its beauty, truth that’s written on a distant star: someone hears these words...

As he turns to leave, the stars begin to break into the heavens: white, gold, some sapphire blue and ruby red. He marvels at the eternal beauty before him. He walks away toward the theater, then turns again to the dust-heap.

If the world is built of sorrow it was built with hands of love.

The Young Writer heads to the theater with his manuscript in hand and goes through the open door. Images and lights from the interior of the theater—the marquee, posters, props—all are suggestive of the play which premieres this night. A feathery wing splashes bold across a poster: three or four letters from the “Prince” run off the edge of a sign. Townspeople, familiar faces, walk to the theater. The School Children skip in a colorful ribbon through the streets.

CURTAIN