

What the Swallows did is from the short story of the same name by American author Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888). The text is the man's farewell to the swallows whom he had grown fond of after a summer spent together.

The music paints the words, falling in couplets and imitating flight in rising patterns. The piece can be sung by three women's voices, or with doubling up to 12 voices.

Swallow, swallow, neighbor swallow,
Starting on your autumn flight,
Pause a moment at my window,
Twitter softly your good-night;
For the summer days are over,
All your duties are well done,
And the happy homes you builded
Have grown empty, one by one.
Swallow, swallow, neighbor swallow,
Are you ready for your flight?
Are all the feather cloaks completed?
Are the little caps all right?
Are the young wings strong and steady
For the journey through the sky?
Come again in early spring-time;
And till then, good-by, good-by!