

The Midas Touch

King Midas liked gold. No, he loved it. His favorite pastime was to sit in the middle of his treasure house and count the money.

Midas was one of the richest kings in Greece. To him, the most beautiful sight in the world was the sparkle of pure gold.

One day, Midas was visited by Silenus, from the court of Dionysus, god of grapes. For days, Midas entertained Silenus in royal fashion. Then he personally escorted him back to Dionysus, high on Mount Olympus.

When they arrived, Dionysus was reclining in his vineyard, eating grapes. "I'm very grateful to you, Midas, for being kind to my old friend," Dionysus said, as juice ran down his cheeks. "And for bringing him back to me yourself. Please, ask for anything, and it will be granted."

It didn't take Midas long to produce a wish. "If I could be granted any wish, it would be that everything I touch would turn to pure gold. Then I would be the richest and most powerful king on earth. And I would be filled with great joy."

"Your wish is granted, King Midas. But I'm sure you'll live to regret your greed."

Dionysus' warning didn't register with Midas. Within nanoseconds of hearing the word "granted," Midas had leaped into the air and raced to his chariot—which, of course, instantly turned to gold. Midas was shouting with glee as he sped away.

When Midas arrived at his castle, he touched its heavy wooden doors at the gate. Instantly, they became solid gold. Midas was ecstatic. So enraptured that he was still unaware of the heavy weight of his new golden clothes.

He race-walked across the courtyard as the stones beneath his feet began to sparkle behind. He tested his touch by picking a flower. It became a golden rose in his hand. He was too excited to notice that it also lost its scent.

"I'm rich! I'm rich! I'm the richest man in the world!" he shouted so loudly that his words began to echo against the stone walls of his castle.

His servants began to gather in the great courtroom. Midas, still shouting, said, "And I can make all of you rich, too. Look," he continued, "I can touch this wall, and it will be pure gold." He did. And it was.

He reached down to pat his bewildered dog on the head. Instantly, the royal mutt became a golden retriever. Still as stone.

Midas backed away from the dog. Puzzled, but still full of glee.

"Bring me some food!" Midas shouted to a servant.

By the time the man entered the room, every inch of it was aglitter. He set the food down in front of the king.

Midas dipped his hands in the washing bowl and was barely able to withdraw them before the golden water gripped his fingers forever. He grabbed a drumstick. It became pure gold. He put a glass to his lips. Instant gold.

Midas began to panic. He grabbed his servant by the arm. “What can I do? I’ll starve to death!”

But the servant, of course, could not answer.

“Daddy! Daddy! Make our ball golden!”

“Stop!” the king cried. But it was too late. His two children jumped, for the last time, into his lap. They instantly turned into heavy statues of gold.

Midas began to weep. Tears fell onto the floor as droplets of gold. They struck the floor with sharp metallic sounds.

Midas ran back outside the castle. And being careful not to touch his horses, he mounted his chariot and set out to Mount Olympus.

“I hate the sight of gold,” he announced to Dionysus. “Why did you ever grant my stupid wish!? I can’t eat. I can’t drink. My precious children are lumps of gold. Please, Dionysus, take away this terrible curse. I beg you.”

Dionysus could not help but smile. Midas had changed so completely in such a short time. He took pity on him.

“A curse, you now call it. Very well, go to the river and wash yourself from head to foot.” he said. “And then wash everything you wish to be restored.

Midas flew to the river. Without even considering whether the river would be turned to gold he dove in. He surfaced in waist deep water and threw a cascade of blue droplets over his head. Flecks of gold began to fall from his clothes and hair, settling to the bottom of the riverbed.

A large clay pot was on the bank of the river. Midas filled it with water and drove back to the palace as fast as his horses could take him. First, he bathed the two golden statues that had been his children. Instantly, they were reborn and began to chatter about having their toys turned to gold—as if they had never been statues.

“No!” cried Midas. “Don’t speak to me about gold. I never want to see it again. Please, now, drive with me to the river. I want to get more water and wash every inch of this palace.”

And so they did. Beginning with his servant, then the dog, then the walls, floors, and flowers.

Rumor has it that Midas never again set foot in his treasury and began to give its contents away faster than it could be replenished. In the end, King Midas came to see what was valuable and what was not.