

King Midas and the golden touch

Long ago, so the old stories tell us, King Midas ruled the land of Greece. He had everything that money could buy, but he wasn't happy.

He lived in a huge palace made of fine white marble, but he wanted a bigger and better one. He had a splendid garden with a river running through it, but he would have liked one the size of a forest. He had lots of servants, but never enough to satisfy him.

More than anything else, King Midas loved counting his money and piling it into great shining heaps of gold, but always he wanted more.

Once, as he was walking in the garden, the king was surprised to hear someone call his name. The sun shone, birds sang in the trees and silver dragonflies came spinning across the pond. King Midas should have been smiling with happiness, but he was his usual grumpy self.

'What scoundrel is hiding in my garden?' he scowled. When the servants dragged an old man out of the bushes, the king was astonished to see Silenus, his old school teacher and a friend of the god Dionysus.

'What are you doing here?' King Midas asked.

'I'm lost,' Silenus said. 'I'm growing old and sometimes I forget where I am.'

For the first time that day, King Midas smiled. Silenus had always been muddle-headed, he remembered. Instead of sending him away, Midas ordered his servants to prepare a feast for him.

When the two men had finished their meal, the king called for a carriage and sent Silenus back to Dionysus. The god was so pleased that Midas had helped his old friend that he offered to grant him a wish.

King Midas had only one wish in the world. 'I wish that everything I touch would turn to gold,' he said, his eyes lighting up at the thought of it.

'Are you sure?' Dionysus asked.

'Sure,' the king nodded. So the god kept his promise.

Now as King Midas wandered through his garden, he touched first a perfect pink rose which turned to gold in his hand. He reached up to an apple. Again it turned to gold. He picked up stones, birds' eggs, snail shells – all changed into gold in his hands. He couldn't stop smiling. The servants followed their king, packing the gold into great deep sacks.

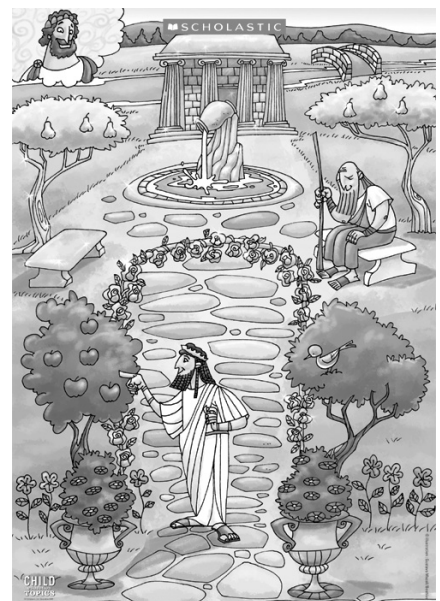
'Take the gold to my counting house,' Midas ordered. 'I'll see to it after lunch.'

But when he sat down at the table, the king got a shock. Everything he tried to eat – bread, meat, a bunch of grapes – turned to gold and cracked his teeth. He tried to take a sip of wine but that, too, flowed into his mouth like melted gold.

'What shall I do?' he asked. 'I'm hungry and thirsty and I hate all this gold!'

He rushed back to Dionysus and begged him to undo his magic. 'I'll never be so foolish and greedy again as long as I live,' he promised.

Dionysus was sorry for King Midas and sent him to bathe in the River Patoclus so that the golden magic could be washed away. And people say, that even now, the river shines gold in the sun.



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