

King Midas and the Golden Touch

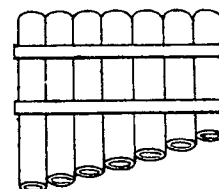
Silenus [sie-LEEN-uhs] was the oldest and merriest follower of Bacchus [BAK-uhs], the Wine God. One fine day he wandered off from Bacchus's band of revelers into a land called Phrygia, where roses grow. Drunk on wine and roses, the old man fell asleep near the palace of King Midas [MY-duhs]. The country folk found him snoring away behind a rose bush. As a joke, they crowned him with a wreath of roses and led him to Midas's court. The King of Phrygia was a well-meaning, good-natured man, though not too bright. He received Silenus kindly, entertained him lavishly, and gave him food and new clothes. Then he led him back to the jolly band of Bacchus, where he belonged.

Bacchus was so pleased to have merry Silenus back that he resolved to make Midas a gift. "You have been so good to my old teacher and companion," he said. "The gods don't forget. Ask for whatever you like, and you shall have it."

Midas, who wasn't much given to thought, didn't have to think twice or even once. He was already rich, but why not be richer? "I wish," he said, "that everything I touch might turn to gold." Bacchus looked at him strangely. "You shall have your wish," he said, and he then went off to listen to Pan's pipes.

Midas returned to his palace full of delight. He touched a marble column as he passed, and it turned yellow. He touched twigs and stones, and they turned to gold. But he began to have doubts when he stroked his favorite dog, and it froze into a cold, golden statue. The dinner gong sounded, and he hurried in to his meal, taking care not to touch his courtiers and servants. He was hungry. The table was loaded with good food—mutton and barley bread, goat cheese and pitted ripe olives. Grapes shone in beautiful colors—crimson, purple, and amber. Sitting down at the head of the table (his chair, of course, turned from ivory to gold), he plucked a luscious purple grape and popped it in his mouth. Oh horrors! It turned into a gold lump. In disgust he spat it out. He tried the soup—it turned to molten

Bacchus = Dionysus



Pan's Pipes



Bacchus was the god of wine.

gold and burned his mouth. Likewise the bread, cheese—everything. He was stricken; at this rate he would starve to death. His courtiers, servants, and dinner guests were watching him curiously. Some of the more hard-hearted were trying not to laugh.

His little daughter Marigold, soft and sweet as an angel, ran up to him with compassion. “Oh dear father!” she cried, “Are you ill? What is the matter?” She embraced him lovingly, her warm arms around his neck. All

at once she stiffened; her limbs grew hard. Her white linen tunic and peaches-and-cream complexion turned yellow. Her lovely hair did not change color—it had always shone like the rays of the rising sun. Little Marigold had turned into a golden statue!

Midas was appalled. He called out to the god: “Bacchus, divine Bacchus, come take away this terrible gift!” At first the god did not hear him. He was far away in the vineyards listening to Pan’s music. But he heard at last and came to the king. “Well, Midas,” said he, kindly, yet a little sternly. “Do you still think gold the finest thing in the world?”

“Never again, good Bacchus,” replied the king humbly. “Take away this golden curse and give me my Marigold!”

What the gods give, they do not take back lightly. But Bacchus was too good-natured to pursue the punishment any further. Besides, he was still grateful to Midas for his kind treatment of Silenus. So he said,

“Go to the River Pactolus and wash.”

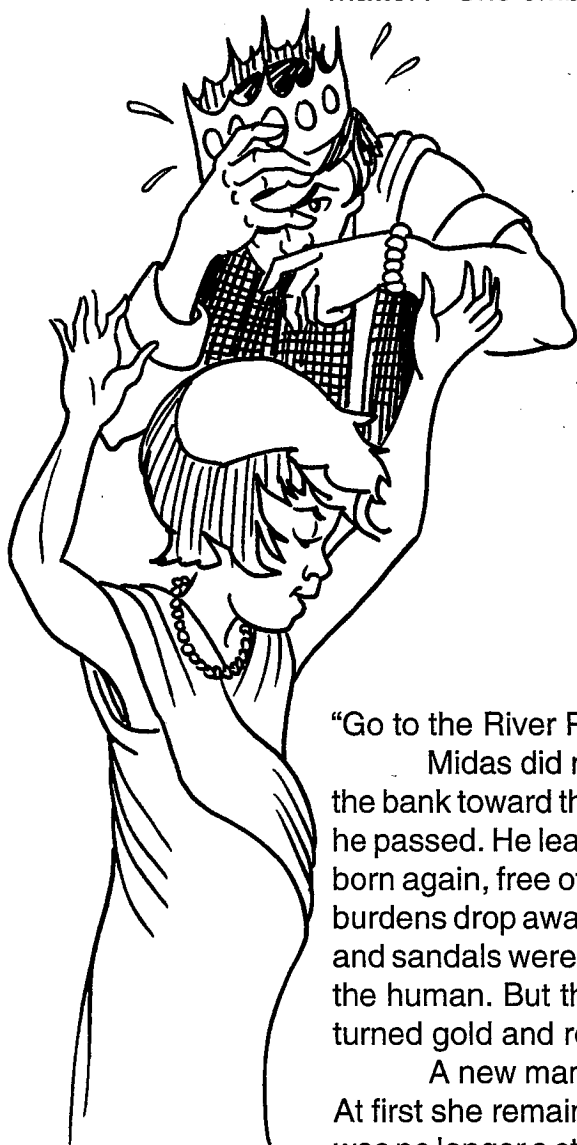
Midas did not hesitate. He ran out of his palace and plunged down the bank toward the river, everything his feet touched still turning to gold as he passed. He leaped into the river. As the waters washed over him, he felt born again, free of the curse of gold and of his greed for gold. He felt all his burdens drop away. His stiff golden tunic was soft white linen again; his belt and sandals were pliant leather once more. He had returned to the natural, the human. But the sandbars of the river where he washed away his sin turned gold and remained so always.

A new man, he ran back to his palace and embraced his daughter. At first she remained cold and hard to his touch. But in a few minutes she was no longer a statue but a warm, breathing, loving little girl, nestling in his arms.

“Oh, father, I had such a strange dream!”

“Never mind, my pet, it’s all over now. Now let’s eat—I’m starved to death!” He almost was.

The servants brought in more hot food, and Midas and his guests finished their meal. Never had food and drink tasted so good! When they had finished, Marigold took her father’s hand and told him about some beautiful white flowers, anemones, she had found in the woods.

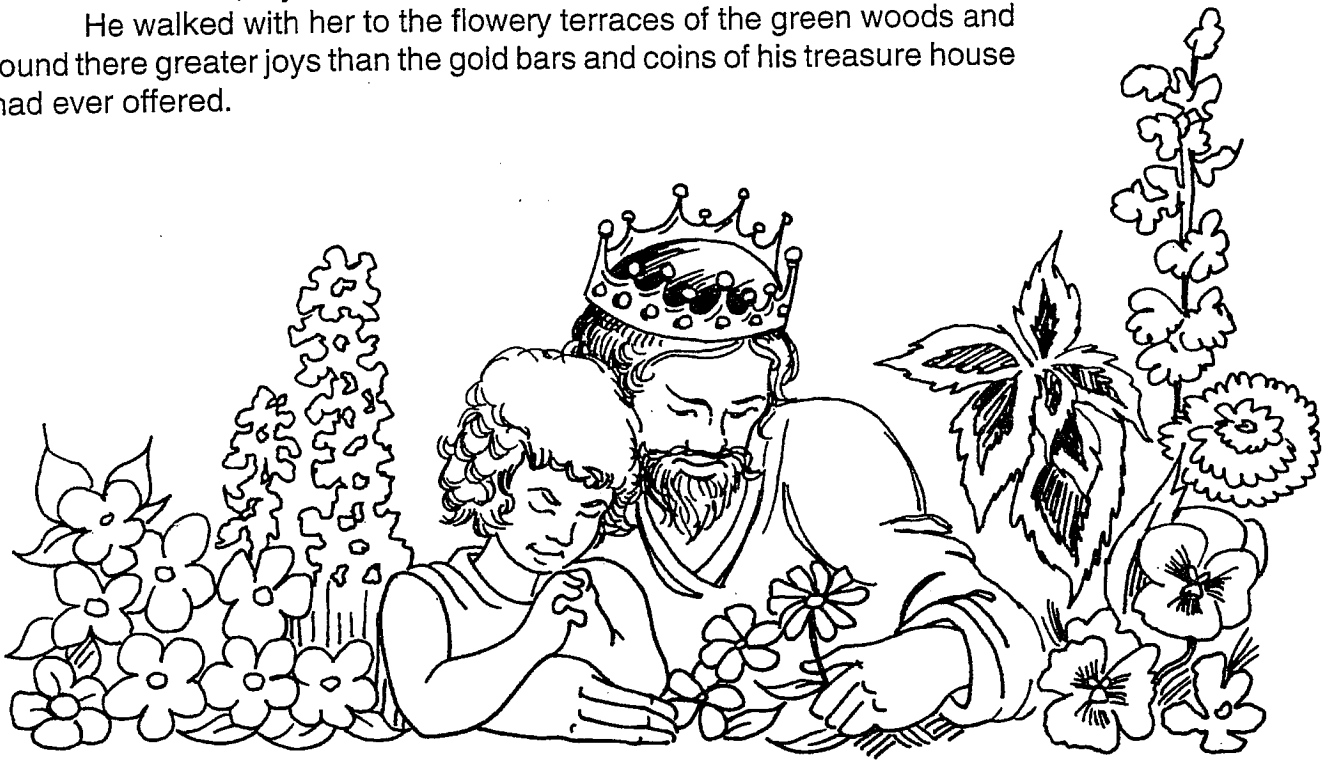


King Midas was horrified when his touch turned his daughter into a golden statue.

“Won’t you come see them with me?”

“Of course, my dear.”

He walked with her to the flowery terraces of the green woods and found there greater joys than the gold bars and coins of his treasure house had ever offered.



King Midas and Marigold stopped to enjoy the beauty of the flowers, which they realized was more important than any golden treasure.