

## **Midas Part 1: The Golden Touch**

Dionysus, the god of drinking and drunkenness, wild music and wild dancing, loved to make great processions across the world with his satyrs, men with hairy legs and horses' hooves, singing and drinking and dancing. And among the satyrs would be Dionysus' old teacher, Silenus, white-haired, pot-bellied, with red wine constantly dribbling from the corners of his mouth, but wise beyond wisdom.

And during one of those great processions across the world, old Silenus was left behind. And he was found by some people, by some mortals, staggering from one side of a road to another, singing to himself. And they caught the satyr; and they bound him with ropes; and they lifted him onto their shoulders; and they carried him to their king.

Now their king was called Midas, King Midas, and he was a worshipper of Dionysus, the god of drinking and drunkenness, and wild music and wild dancing. And when he saw the old satyr bound with ropes, he was furious with his people. He took a knife; he cut the ropes; he sat the old satyr on his own golden throne; and he ordered that a feast be held in honour of Silenus.

And when the feast was finished, King Midas himself led the satyr to Dionysus, the great god. And when Dionysus saw his old teacher, his heart was filled with happiness. He ran across. He threw his arms round Silenus' neck. He kissed him on both cheeks and he turned to King Midas and he said, 'I will grant you one wish, one wish and one wish only. What do you want?'

And at that time King Midas needed gold. He needed more gold. And he was thinking to himself, 'If I ask for my chests and my coffers to be filled with gold, soon enough the gold will be spent. How could I get more gold than I've ever dreamed of?'

And then, suddenly, an idea came into his mind, beautiful in its simplicity. He said, 'What I want is this: that everything I touch be turned into shining gold.' And the great god Dionysus looked at the king, and he smiled, and he bowed his head, and he vanished into the light.

And King Midas turned to walk home, and, as he turned, he felt a stiffening about himself. And he looked down, and his clothes and his robes had hardened into gold. He crouched down. He touched the tip of a blade of grass. And there it was like a little golden dagger, jutting out of the ground. He ran and plucked an apple from a tree, and it was heavy, yellow gold, cold against the palm of his hand. He touched the trunk of another tree, and there it was, a golden tree stretching high above his head, the leaves no longer whispering and rustling, but clinking and clanking like golden chimes.

And King Midas ran this way and that way, touching this and touching that. And when he came to his palace, he stretched out his hands on the doorway of the palace, and there was a golden portal reflecting the light of the sun. He strode inside. He told his servants to prepare a great feast, so that he could celebrate his golden gift. And meat and bread and wine and honeycakes were served; and King Midas sat down, picked up a piece of bread, put it into his mouth and bit. And his teeth scraped across rough gold. He grabbed a cup; he lifted it to his mouth. At the touch of his lips the wine hardened into gold and he was spitting out little golden shards. Suddenly, he understood his mistake, he understood his terrible mistake.

At that moment his little daughter, whom he loved, came running across the floor of the palace. She threw her arms around her father's neck, and she clattered onto the ground, the perfect, golden statue of a little girl but cold, cold, dead gold. Midas knelt beside her and his golden tears clattered onto her golden face. And he said, 'Dionysus, Dionysus, I have made a terrible mistake. I beg you, take back your gift of gold.'

And on the high slopes of Mount Olympus Dionysus, the god of drinking and drunkenness, wild music, wild dancing, looked down at King Midas, and he felt pity stirring in his heart. And he appeared before the king. He said, 'Go and wash yourself in the River Pactolus where it bursts out of the side of the mountain, and the gold will be washed from your skin, your heart, your soul, and everything you've turned into gold will be returned to its proper form.'

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And Midas leapt to his feet, and he ran out of the palace, and he ran, and he ran, and he ran until he came to the place where the River Pactolus burst from the side of the mountain. And he plunged into the water. He washed himself from head to foot. And as he washed himself, the gold was washed from his heart, his skin, his mind, his soul.

And when he climbed out of the water, he hated gold with all the strength of the love that he'd had for it before; and as he climbed out of the water, everything he'd turned into gold was returned to its proper form; and his little daughter leapt to her feet all unknowing, and ran into the arms of her nursemaid. And from that day onwards, the water of that river, the River Pactolus, has glimmered golden in the light of the sun. And men and women have panned the mud and the silt of the river bed for hard, little, shining nuggets of gold.