

THE GOLDEN TOUCH.

There was once a king who was very rich. His name was Midas. King Midas loved gold better than anything else in the world. There was nothing he loved half so well except his little daughter, Marygold. He thought, foolish man, that the way to show this love, was to get for her as much gold as he could.

Down deep under his castle, was a small, dark room. In this room King Midas kept his gold. Every day he went there to look at it.

He was always careful to lock the door, so that no one could follow him. This room was a very dreary place. Only one little sunbeam ever thought of peeping into it. King Midas loved this little sunbeam, because his gold could not shine without it.

He used to put his treasure right where the little ray would fall upon it. Then he would play with the pieces of gold, throwing them up and catching them again. He had a large bowl of solid gold. It was so bright that he could see himself in it. He would sit for hours and look at his face in this rich mirror. Sometimes the face seemed to be making fun of him. Then he would lay it aside.

Next, he would bring out his bags of gold dust and let the dust run through his fingers, as a child plays with sand. He often said to himself:

“Oh, I wish I had the whole world for my treasure-room, and full of gold all my own; then I could be happy.”

One day while he was looking at his gold, he thought the sunbeam grew larger. It seemed to fill the whole room. The rays danced in the corners like fairies. King Midas looked up. There stood a beautiful young man near the door. His face was so bright that the king shaded his eyes with his hands as he looked.

“You are a very rich man, friend Midas. With all this gold you ought to be the happiest man in the world.”

“Yes,” said Midas, “I have done very well; but it has taken almost a lifetime to get this. Now, if I could live a thousand years, I might get rich!”

“Why, haven’t you enough yet?” asked the young man, opening his eyes very wide.

“No,” said Midas.

“Well,” said the stranger, “I should like to know what would satisfy you. Will you be kind enough to tell me?”

The king thought for a time and then said:

“If I could have my way, everything I touch would turn to gold.”

“Are you quite sure this would satisfy you?” asked the young man.

“Sure of it?” cried Midas. “Why shouldn’t it satisfy me?”

“And are you sure you would never be sorry you made such a wish?” said the stranger.

“How could I be sorry? I tell you I should be the happiest man in the world.”

“Very well,” said the stranger, “to-morrow, at sunrise, you will have the Golden Touch.”



When King Midas awoke the next morning a little sunbeam shone on his bed. He put out his hand and touched the coverlet. It was changed to gold. With a cry of joy he sprang from his bed.

“Hurrah! I have the Golden Touch,” he cried.

He ran about touching everything in the room. Of course they all turned to gold. Then he dressed himself and was delighted to find that his clothes had become beautiful garments of gold. He put on his spectacles, but could not see through them. Taking them off and rubbing them he saw that the glass had become plates of gold.

As he went down stairs, he put his hand on the railing. It turned to gold.

He opened the door and went into the garden. The roses were nodding in the fresh morning breeze; the air was filled with their sweet perfume. But King Midas did not care for this. What do you think he did? Why, he changed everyone of those roses into hard, shining gold. The dew drops became diamonds.

Then he went back to the house. Breakfast was ready. Marygold had not yet come in, so he had her called. She always had bread and milk for her breakfast. She ate it out of a beautiful china bowl. This bowl had strange trees and houses painted upon it. While the father waited for her, he thought he would change her bowl to gold.

“That will please her,” thought he.

Just then he heard her coming. The door opened and she came in. She had her apron to her eyes and was crying as if her heart would break.

“Why, what is the matter my dear child?” asked the king.

“Oh, my beautiful roses! They are all ugly and yellow,” cried she. “When I try to smell them, their hard petals prick my nose.”

“Well, dear, don’t cry about it. Sit down and eat your bread and milk.”

They both sat down to the table. He thought she would forget about the roses, when she saw her golden bowl; but she was too sad to notice it. Perhaps it was best that she did not, for she had always been so fond of looking at the pictures upon it. These faded as soon as the bowl was changed to gold.

His walk in the garden had given the king a good appetite. His breakfast of baked potatoes, fish, hot cakes and coffee looked very good indeed.

“Well, this is nice,” he said, as he poured out a cup of coffee. He smiled when he saw the coffee pot turn to gold.

“I shall soon have nothing but gold on my table,” thought he, and began to wonder where he could keep his treasure.

He raised the cup of coffee to his lips. That, too, turned to gold. Of course he could not drink it. He set the cup down quickly. Marygold looked up and asked,

“What is the matter, father?”

“Nothing, child, nothing,” said the king.

He thought he would try one of the fish. As soon as he touched it, it became hard and bright. Then he broke one of the cakes. It became yellow and heavy.

“I don’t quite see how I am to get any breakfast,” thought the king.

He looked at Marygold. She was quietly eating her bread and milk. How he longed to have just one bite! What good would all this gold do him, if he could not eat anything?

The potatoes looked so tempting that he thought he would try again.

“Perhaps I can swallow so quickly, that a potato will not have time to turn to gold,” thought he.

Poor foolish Midas! He popped one into his mouth, but it changed as soon as he touched it. The hot gold burned him so that he jumped up and cried out with pain.

“Why, what is the matter, dear father?” cried Marygold. “Have you burned yourself?”

“Oh, my child,” said the king, “I don’t know what is to become of your poor father!”

Marygold got down from her chair and ran to him. By this time Midas hated the very sight of gold. He felt that Marygold was all he had to love now. He took her in his arms and kissed her.

Oh, unhappy Midas! Marygold, too, had become hard, shining gold. There were the tears still on her cheeks; they were little lumps of gold now. Everything was the same, even the pretty dimple in her chin.

Poor Midas! His heart was almost broken. He threw himself upon the floor and tried to pray. The words would not come.

All at once the room grew very bright. Midas raised his head. There stood the stranger who had given him the Golden Touch. His face was sad, yet Midas thought he saw a smile there, too, as he said:

“Well, friend Midas, how do you like the Golden Touch?”

“Hush!” cried the king. “I hate the very name of gold!”

“Why, how is this?” asked the stranger. “Have you not enough yet?”

“Enough!” cried the king. “Too much! I wish I might never see gold again. Gold is not everything. See,” said he, pointing to Marygold. “I would give all the gold in the world, just to see her smile again.”

“You are sure you have had enough of the Golden Touch?” asked the stranger.

Midas’ look showed that he thought the question a very foolish one.

“Take a vase,” said the young man, “and go to the river that runs by your garden; jump head first into the river and fill the vase with the water; then put a few drops of it on anything you have changed to gold. It will become as it was before,” and the stranger was gone.

You may be sure the king lost no time. He took a vase, and running to the river, jumped in. As soon as he touched the water his heart seemed to grow light. He was glad to see the vase become china again.

He filled it and went quickly to the house. The first thing he did was to sprinkle a little water over Marygold. As soon as it touched her, her cheeks became pink and her blue eyes opened wide.

“Why are you throwing water on me, father?” she cried. “You will soil my pretty dress.”

The king said nothing. He did not want her to know how foolish he had been. He took her in his arms and kissed her many times.

While she went to put on another dress, he took the vase into the garden and put a few drops of water on each flower. When Marygold came out she was delighted to see them bowing to her as if nothing had been wrong.

The king did not stop until he had put water on everything he had turned to gold. Then he remembered that he was very hungry. Never had he eaten anything half so good as that breakfast. He was a happy man now.

Two things were left to remind him of the Golden Touch. The sand in the river sparkled like gold, and Marygold’s hair, which had once been brown, now had a tinge of gold. As this made her more beautiful, Midas was not sorry. He used to say it was the only gold he cared for now.