

# Midas and the Golden Touch

Deep in the heart of what is now Turkey runs the River Pactolus, famed for its gold-laden waters. But long ago, in a time very different from today, when strange and mysterious things were commonplace, and when the gods walked the Earth, the Pactolus ran as clean and blue as the summer sky.

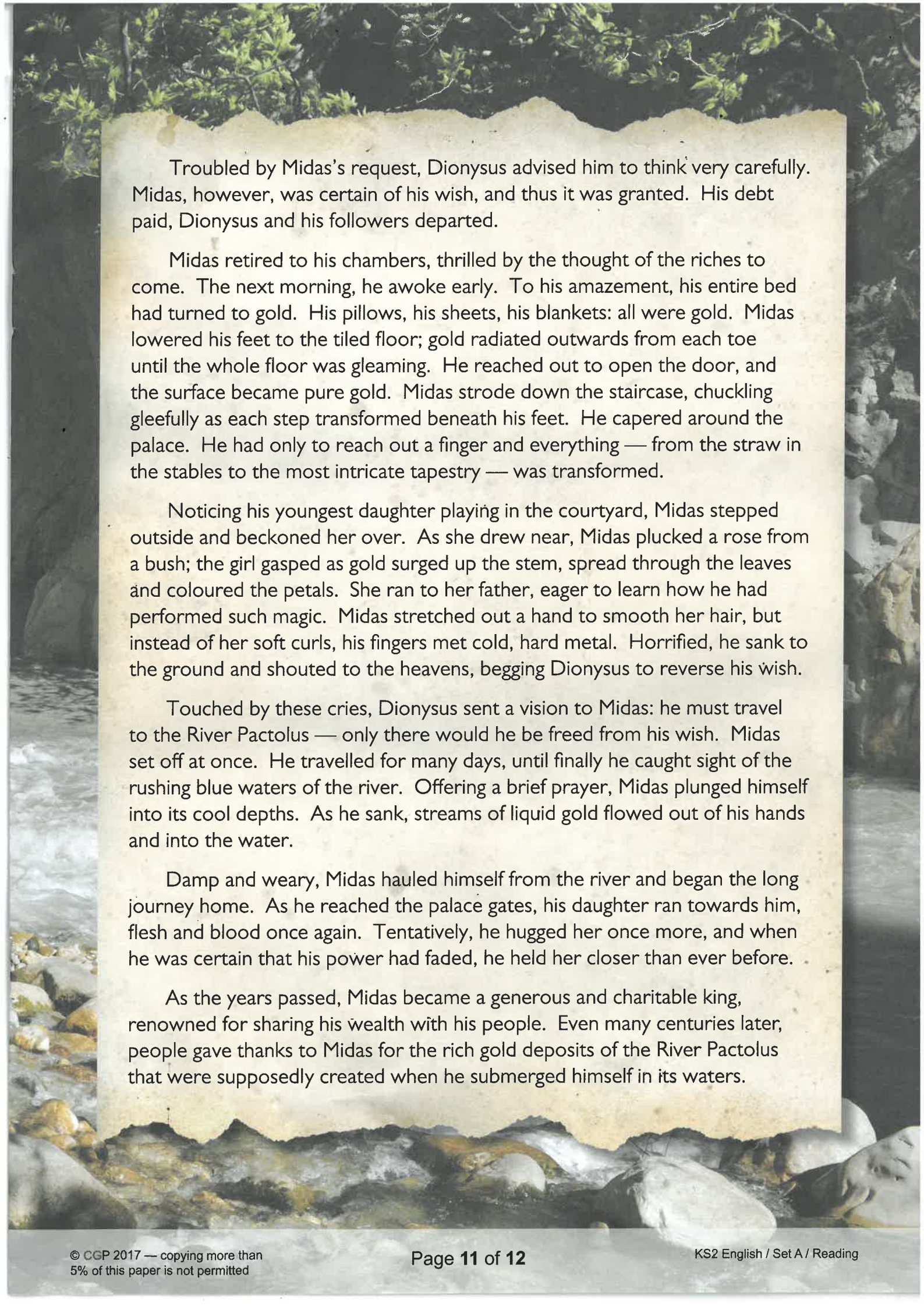
At that time, the kingdom through which the Pactolus flowed was ruled by King Midas. The King had enough riches to last even the most extravagant person for several lifetimes, but it wasn't enough; his bounteous wealth could not satisfy his appetite for gold.

One morning, as Midas admired his collection of gold coins, the palace guards brought forth a creature that was half-man, half-goat, whom they had found sleeping amongst the rose bushes in the palace gardens. Such creatures were common in ancient times, and Midas was not shocked. Indeed, he recognised him as Silenus, tutor to Dionysus, the great god of revelry. Silenus explained that he had become separated from the rest of his party, and had sought refuge in Midas's gardens.

Midas welcomed Silenus as a privileged guest and ordered that he be served the finest wine and the most decadent food. For ten whole days they feasted on a spread of delicacies: succulent meats, rich cheeses and honey-coated fruits, to name but a few. The feasting was accompanied by music and merrymaking that would make even Dionysus proud.

On the final day, Dionysus arrived at the palace in search of Silenus. Learning of Midas's hospitality, Dionysus offered to grant Midas one wish as a sign of his gratitude. Midas was quick to decide what to wish for.

"I wish that everything I touch would turn to gold!" he exclaimed.



Troubled by Midas's request, Dionysus advised him to think very carefully. Midas, however, was certain of his wish, and thus it was granted. His debt paid, Dionysus and his followers departed.

Midas retired to his chambers, thrilled by the thought of the riches to come. The next morning, he awoke early. To his amazement, his entire bed had turned to gold. His pillows, his sheets, his blankets: all were gold. Midas lowered his feet to the tiled floor; gold radiated outwards from each toe until the whole floor was gleaming. He reached out to open the door, and the surface became pure gold. Midas strode down the staircase, chuckling gleefully as each step transformed beneath his feet. He capered around the palace. He had only to reach out a finger and everything — from the straw in the stables to the most intricate tapestry — was transformed.

Noticing his youngest daughter playing in the courtyard, Midas stepped outside and beckoned her over. As she drew near, Midas plucked a rose from a bush; the girl gasped as gold surged up the stem, spread through the leaves and coloured the petals. She ran to her father, eager to learn how he had performed such magic. Midas stretched out a hand to smooth her hair, but instead of her soft curls, his fingers met cold, hard metal. Horrified, he sank to the ground and shouted to the heavens, begging Dionysus to reverse his wish.

Touched by these cries, Dionysus sent a vision to Midas: he must travel to the River Pactolus — only there would he be freed from his wish. Midas set off at once. He travelled for many days, until finally he caught sight of the rushing blue waters of the river. Offering a brief prayer, Midas plunged himself into its cool depths. As he sank, streams of liquid gold flowed out of his hands and into the water.

Damp and weary, Midas hauled himself from the river and began the long journey home. As he reached the palace gates, his daughter ran towards him, flesh and blood once again. Tentatively, he hugged her once more, and when he was certain that his power had faded, he held her closer than ever before.

As the years passed, Midas became a generous and charitable king, renowned for sharing his wealth with his people. Even many centuries later, people gave thanks to Midas for the rich gold deposits of the River Pactolus that were supposedly created when he submerged himself in its waters.