The Midas Touch

(or: be careful what you wish for!)

Tutor: Well, what are we going to talk about today?

*Student: We could talk about a Greek myth.*

Another Greek myth?

*Yes.*

Another tragic story?

*Well, this one ends well.*

Thank goodness for that.

*Some of them are a bit grim, aren’t they?*

Yes.

*This one ends well*

Good. Which one is it?

*It’s called “The Midas Touch”.*

Oh yes. I know that one.

*It’s a good one.*

It is a good one.

*I like it.*

The Midas touch is a really good myth.

*They’re not all true, you know.*

Mmmm…?

*The ancient Greek myths aren’t all true.*

Well, no.

*No.*

And anyway, it depends what you mean by “true”.

*How do you mean, “It depends what you mean by true”?*

Well, some stories contain a truth even though they are not actually true.

*You mean even if it never actually happened the way it was told?*

Yes.

*So a story might not be a true story.*

Yes, it might be made up.

*But still be a kind of true story?*

Yes, it might contain a kind of truth.

*For example?*

The story of Midas’ touch can’t really be true.

*Well, no.*

But it contains a kind of truth.

*Well, yes. I suppose it does.*

Most good stories contain some kind of truth.

*I suppose they do.*

They are often about good and evil.

*The story of Midas’ touch is about greed.*

How greed can turn you into someone quite bad.

*Which is a kind of truth.*

Well, yes, it is.

*It starts with a king, of course.*

Of course.

*King Midas in fact.*

A very rich king.

*Very rich and very mean.*

He loved gold.

*But he hated to share any of it.*

Yes. He got more and more mean.

*More and more greedy.*

And all because he loved gold.

*He loved it more and more and more.*

The more he had the more he wanted.

*It’s often like that.*

His kingdom was called Phrygia, wasn’t it?

*Yes. Phrygia.*

Sounds like something you keep the butter in.

*It does, doesn’t it!*

And Phrygia was a rich kingdom.

*Loads of gold and all that.*

But King Midas was mean.

*Really mean.*

And the more gold he got, the more greedy he got.

*And the more gold he got the more mean he got.*

He never shared anything with anybody.

*All the people in Phrygia were poor.*

But all King Midas wanted was gold.

*More and more and more gold.*

He was obsessed with it.

*He thought about it all day long.*

He used to fill baths with gold coins so he could bathe in it.

*He did. Must have been cold!*

And I expect he ate off gold plates.

*With gold spoons and forks, probably.*

He sat on a golden throne, no doubt.

*Wore lots of gold rings and stuff.*

All that sort of thing.

*But the story begins with an old man.*

An old man called Silenus.

*He was found one day in a ditch in Phrygia.*

Passed out cold.

*He had been a schoolmaster.*

But he was an old man, now.

*One of his pupils had become a god.*

The god Dionysus, in fact.

*Mmmm…*

People could do that in Greek myths.

*Become a god.*

Yes. And gods could do magic.

*Of course.*

Dionysus had been a pupil of Silenus.

*Many years before.*

And Silenus and Dionysus had been very good friends.

*And Dionysus was a god, now.*

The god of good times, you could say.

*The ancient Greeks seem to have had lots of gods.*

Gods for just about everything.

*Yes. Gods for just about everything.*

Dionysus was the god of wine and revelry.

*What’s revelry?*

Revelry?

*Yes. What’s revelry?*

Oh, it’s partying. Having a good time. Drinking a lot of wine.

*Probably a bit too much wine.*

Probably.

*Right.*

Anyway, this Silenus bloke was found in Phrygia, passed out cold.

*He was very, very drunk.*

Too much revelry, I expect.

*Probably!*

He was so drunk he was very ill.

*But King Midas rescued him.*

Took him back to the palace.

*Put him in a nice, warm bed.*

And looked after him until he was fit and well again.

*And then sent him on his way.*

Yes.

*So King Midas can’t have been a really bad man.*

Not all bad, anyway.

*No, I suppose not.*

Maybe he was just a bit foolish?

*He was very foolish.*

Maybe his obsession with gold made him foolish.

*Maybe.*

But then Dionysus got to hear about all this.

*Probably from the old man.*

Silenus probably told Dionysus how kind King Midas had been.

*So he came to see King Midas to thank him.*

And King Midas must have been well chuffed.

*Speaking to a god!*

Yes. Very posh!

*The god said that he would grant King Midas any wish.*

Because he had been so kind,

*King Midas could ask for anything at all.*

Dionysus would give him whatever he wanted.

*Yes, and I know what Midas asked for.*

So do I.

*Silly man.*

It was his greed speaking, of course.

*Yes. It was his greed speaking.*

He asked that anything he touched would turn to gold.

*Whatever he touched.*

Gold!

*What we still call the ‘Midas touch’.*

Yes.

*It seemed like a good idea at the time.*

It wasn’t, but it seemed to be.

*He didn’t really think, did he?*

No. He didn’t.

*He didn’t think at all.*

He just said the first thing which came into his head.

*Very silly.*

It was because of the greed.

*It stopped him from thinking.*

All he could think about was gold.

*More and more gold.*

He felt as if he could never have enough of it.

*Exactly.*

Dionysus tried to talk him out of it.

*Of course he did.*

Make him see sense.

*Yes.*

He could see what would happen.

*He could see that the Midas touch would be a curse, not a blessing.*

But Midas wouldn’t listen.

*No.*

And when he woke the next morning, he jumped straight out of bed.

*He wanted to see if his wish had come true.*

He ran round the palace, touching things.

*Like a little child.*

Had his wish come true?

*It had, unfortunately.*

Well, at first it was really exciting.

*Yes. At first.*

He touched a chair and – bingo!

*It was gold.*

He touched a table and – bingo!

*It was gold.*

This was amazing!

*He thought his new touch was wonderful.*

The Midas touch.

*The touch which turned everything to gold.*

Everything!

*Wonderful.*

But then he wanted breakfast.

*Mmmm…*

So he touched a slice of bread and – bingo!

*It was gold.*

He wanted some coffee, so he picked up a cup and – bingo!

*It was gold.*

Then his daughter came in to say good morning.

*Ugh oh.*

I can see what happens next.

*Yes. Exactly.*

Without thinking, King Midas hugged her.

*His daughter!*

And - bingo! She was gold. Solid gold.

*A statue of his beloved daughter, in gold.*

This was awful.

*The Midas touch was an awful thing.*

Absolutely awful.

*So Midas went back to Dionysus in a hurry.*

A big hurry.

*As fast as he could.*

He was very unhappy.

*He flung himself down at the feet of the god and wept.*

He begged Dionysus to take away his Midas touch.

*Dionysus must have been expecting him.*

Must have been.

*He knew what would happen.*

He knew that the Midas touch would be a curse, not a blessing.

*Anyway, he told King Midas to go and wash his hands in the river.*

Which he did at once.

*He wanted no more of the Midas touch!*

He would do exactly what Dionysus said.

*As quickly as possible.*

So he rushed to the river.

*At top speed.*

And washed his hands.

*As the god had told him to.*

Exactly as the god had told him to.

*And then he hurried back to his palace.*

And found that everything was back to normal.

*His breakfast wasn’t gold any more.*

His coffee wasn’t gold any more.

*And, best of all, his daughter wasn’t gold any more.*

No. His daughter was her normal self again.

*And King Midas didn’t have the Midas touch any more.*

He hugged his daughter with tears of joy in his eyes.

*But maybe a bit carefully, at first?*

I suppose so! Just in case!

*But it was OK.*

The Midas touch really had gone.

*And Midas was cured of his greed.*

Absolutely.

*He wasn’t mean any more.*

He was kind and generous from then on.

*He shared the wealth of his kingdom fairly.*

Yes, and everyone was happy.

*Maybe he even got rid of his gold?*

Gave it to the poor, perhaps?

*Very likely!*

I don’t expect he liked the stuff much any more.

*No. Not any more!*

What would you wish for?

*Mmmm…?*

If you could.

*Well…*