

Abigail Moselle
UVP
The Golden Child
Senior Prize
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It's dark in here. Dark and cold and so different from the life I knew. So alone. I have been left with nothing but sound. It's worse than death I imagine. I have heard my mother's hysterical cries, the disgusted mutterings, pitying comments... but the most awful sounds came from my father, a never-ending litany of self-pitying guilt. It made me sick. And it didn't change anything. My transformation cannot be reversed. For this I will never forgive him.

I was born the first and only child of Midas, king of Pessinus, and his beautiful young wife. My mother was from a region in northern Greece and although my father tried his best to make her feel at home, she was never entirely comfortable in Phrygia. She had been torn suddenly from her family, friends and lifestyle and I don't think she ever truly recovered. But my birth was a stepping-stone: by having me, she gained something that was hers and hers alone. She lavished me with love, and I adored her. One of my most cherished memories is of sitting with her by a river, eating pomegranates and honey. I told her she was beautiful, and she put down her pomegranate and kissed me, replying, "Not nearly as beautiful as you will be, my love"

She was so excited for my future, for my marriage and my children. If she could have buried me perhaps she would have been all right. But the constant torture of having my body, alive yet unable to move, right in front of her tipped her over the edge. My golden frame became a symbol of everything Midas had taken from her, and the emptiness she had gotten in return. And she was supposed to love him, to eat with him, share a bed with him. She tried to talk to me, but it brought her no respite. Eventually she drowned herself in the Pactolus River, the same river that had cured my father of his 'gift'.

My father was King and very busy, but always tried to make time for me. He was very much in love with my mother, and her unhappiness affected him more than he ever let on. With my birth and my mother's subsequent contentment, their relationship improved beyond measure, and as such he always treated me with great care and kindness so as to keep it that way. I don't know if he truly loved me, or if he just enjoyed the happiness I brought to his marriage. In the same way, I don't know whether his sorrow came from his broken relationship with my mother, the contempt people poured on him or whether he missed me for myself. But I was much younger then. All I knew of my father were the two facades he presented to me: the benevolent king and the playful 'pater' who indulged me to a fault.

He often wept. At first, when I understood and had grown accustomed to my paralysis, this upset me. But then my mind grew up and he became irritating.

My father was famed throughout Phrygia for his hedonism and his pristine rose garden. His love of the life's pleasures was evident throughout our beautiful palace, the fine food and wine we ate and of course, the many beautiful and expensive gifts bequeathed to me. I remember I would be sitting in the garden or

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in my mother's room, surrounded by slaves, when my father or one of his equally decadent friends would come bounding towards us. Then, kneeling in front of my mother, they would request permission to present the 'κακος η παις' (beautiful child) with a gift, to which she would assent with a smile. Then I would be grabbed from my chair, whirled around and put down, giggling, in front of a range of exquisite gifts from dolls to a baby tiger! The nurses would shake their heads, saying I was overindulged, and I would thank my benefactor graciously.

I was absent for most of the events that led up to my misfortune. I remember Silenus, a funny little man with goat legs, horns and a beard. He was found one day in my father's celebrated rose garden, passed out with intoxication, and carried into the palace. He stayed for many days, and my father was a generous host, throwing great feasts and parties for the satyr. I did not play a huge role in these, as there was to be a great deal of drinking and other pastimes unsuitable for young children, so I only saw the satyr a few times and was completely unaware of his importance. I was also unaware of the importance of the man who came to collect him. All I knew was that he talked with my father for a very long time. I grew bored waiting for them to finish, and so went off to play. When I had returned, the satyr and the other man had gone, and my father was eating, or at least attempting to. Because something very odd was happening. Every time he touched something, it transformed. It became gold. Captivated by this funny and amusing trick, I ran towards him so he could tell me how it was done. I tried to climb onto his lap, as I had done a million times before. Only this time I heard him shout "No!" And then it all stopped.

It was only when Dionysus himself told me what my father did that I understood. It was then that I began to hate him. It is Midas's punishment that I shall stand here always, as a reminder of his own stupidity. Both he and my mother begged Dionysus to let me go, but their pleas came to nothing. My father left the palace soon after my mother's suicide and became a follower of Pan. He has not been heard of since and so I stand alone, in an empty palace, with only my memories for company.