

INTRODUCTION

These stories are thousands of years old. They come from ancient Greece. In the days when these stories were first told, most people believed in gods and goddesses. They also believed in heroes and monsters and magic weapons.

In those days, people told stories to explain the world around them. The sun was a fiery chariot and it was pulled by fierce, fast horses. When people died, a dark boatman took them across the river of death to the kingdom of the dead. And the spider was once a clever young woman.

In *The Golden Touch*, King Midas asks a god for a wish. The god gives Midas what he asks for; but it does not make him happy. Instead, he loses the thing he loves most.

Scientists have a special name for spiders. They call them Arachnidae. In *The First Spider*, a girl called Arachne makes the goddess Minerva angry. You will find out how Minerva punishes Arachne.

In *The Donkey's Ears*, King Midas appears again. But still he has not learnt his lesson. The story shows that sometimes even a king could be foolish. It also shows that some people find it very difficult to keep a secret.

Many old buildings have lots of corridors and it is very easy to get lost in them. There is a labyrinth under the palace of King Minos. A clever engineer called Daedalus has built it for the King. It is the home of Minos's monster, the Minotaur. In *Theseus and the Minotaur* we meet a brave young man, and the clever young woman who helps him find his way through the labyrinth.

In *The Wonderful Wings* we actually meet the engineer, Daedalus. He does not like people less clever than himself. One day he makes King Minos angry, and the King decides to punish his rude servant. Minos locks Daedalus and his young son Icarus in prison at the top of a high tower. But Daedalus finds a way to escape.

Why do we have winter? Why can't it be summer all year round? Of course, we all know the seasons are caused by the Earth's journey round the sun. But *Pluto and Persephone* makes a more interesting story!

Music is a wonderful thing. It can make strong, hard people cry. It can make lazy people dance. The musician Orpheus goes to the kingdom of the dead to look for his dead wife. His music makes a terrible three-headed guard dog as gentle as a kitten. It even touches the heart of the dark god Pluto. Can Orpheus save his wife?

In *The Golden Chariot of the Sun*, a boy called Phaeton believes his father is dead. Then one day his mother tells him a secret. His father is not dead. He is the sun-god Apollo! And so Phaeton sets out to find his father.

Read on to find out more.

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THE GOLDEN TOUCH

Midas

Some people are very lucky. When we talk about these people, we say ‘He has the Midas touch,’ or ‘Everything she touches turns to gold.’ By that we mean everything is done well. We do not mean that everything really turns to gold. 5

But long ago, that did happen to one person. He prayed for the golden touch. The gods granted his wish. From that time on, everything he touched really did turn into gold, but it did not make him happy. 10

That person was a king called Midas. He had everything — a beautiful palace with wonderful flower gardens, plenty of money and a loving family. He had whole rooms full of gold, but he always wanted more. Gold was the most important thing in his life. When he prayed to the gods, he did not pray to be happy. He did not pray to be a good king. He just hoped, wished and prayed for more gold. Every day he thought about it and at night he dreamt about it. 15

A visitor

In those days one of the gods, called Dionysus, would often come down from heaven and spend some time on the Earth. Dionysus was the god of wine. He liked to drink wine all the time. His best friend was Silenus. Silenus was a satyr. From his waist up to his head he looked like a man but under his long hair were large, 25