

Mrs Midas

It was late September. I'd just poured a glass of wine, begun to unwind, while the vegetables cooked. The kitchen filled with the smell of itself, relaxed, its steamy breath gently blanching the windows. So I opened one, then with my fingers wiped the other's glass like a brow. He was standing under the pear tree snapping a twig.

Now the garden was long and the visibility poor, the way the dark of the ground seems to drink the light of the sky, but that twig in his hand was gold. And then he plucked a pear from a branch. – we grew Fondante d'Automne – and it sat in his palm, like a lightbulb. On. I thought to myself, Is he putting fairy lights in the tree?

He came into the house. The doorknobs gleamed. He drew the blinds. You know the mind; I thought of the Field of the Cloth of Gold and of Miss Macready. He sat in that chair like a king on a burnished throne. The look on his face was strange, wild, vain. I said, What in the name of God is going on? He started to laugh.

I served up the meal. For starters, corn on the cob. Within seconds he was spitting out the teeth of the rich. He toyed with his spoon, then mine, then with the knives, the forks. He asked where was the wine. I poured with a shaking hand, a fragrant, bone-dry white from Italy, then watched as he picked up the glass, goblet, golden chalice, drank.

It was then that I started to scream. He sank to his knees. After we'd both calmed down, I finished the wine on my own, hearing him out. I made him sit on the other side of the room and keep his hands to himself. I locked the cat in the cellar. I moved the phone. The toilet I didn't mind. I couldn't believe my ears:

how he'd had a wish. Look, we all have wishes; granted. But who has wishes granted? Him. Do you know about gold? It feeds no one; aurum, soft, untarnishable; slakes no thirst. He tried to light a cigarette; I gazed, entranced, as the blue flame played on its luteous stem. At least, I said, you'll be able to give up smoking for good.

Separate beds. in fact, I put a chair against my door, near petrified. He was below, turning the spare room into the tomb of Tutankhamun. You see, we were passionate then, in those halcyon days; unwrapping each other, rapidly, like presents, fast food. But now I feared his honeyed embrace,

the kiss that would turn my lips to a work of art.

And who, when it comes to the crunch, can live
with a heart of gold? That night, I dreamt I bore
his child, its perfect ore limbs, its little tongue
like a precious latch, its amber eyes
holding their pupils like flies. My dream milk
burned in my breasts. I woke to the streaming sun.

So he had to move out. We'd a caravan
in the wilds, in a glade of its own. I drove him up
under the cover of dark. He sat in the back.
And then I came home, the woman who married the fool
who wished for gold. At first, I visited, odd times,
parking the car a good way off, then walking.

You knew you were getting close. Golden trout
on the grass. One day, a hare hung from a larch,
a beautiful lemon mistake. And then his footprints,
glistening next to the river's path. He was thin,
delirious; hearing, he said, the music of Pan
from the woods. Listen. That was the last straw.

What gets me now is not the idiocy or greed
but lack of thought for me. Pure selfishness. I sold
the contents of the house and came down here.
I think of him in certain lights, dawn, late afternoon,
and once a bowl of apples stopped me dead. I miss most,
even now, his hands, his warm hands on my skin, his touch.

Carol Ann Duffy