

THE MIDAS TOUCH

A MONOLOGUE

MIDAS

A disheveled, wild-eyed man stares at the audience, then speaks.

You don't know what you're asking me to do.

I always wanted to say that. I think that all human beings have this need to imagine their lives as this great heroic arc, but for comic book writers, it's a sickness. Our jobs are to imagine lives as heroic arcs, and what you do every day becomes you, right, so it's natural that our delusions of grandeur would be grander than everyone else's. And so yeah, I thought my life would be heroic, I thought my talent was a super power, I thought my work would save people.

I wanted to save people.

And maybe that's funny to you, the idea that comic books could save people, but I was saved: you know, sensitive little book worm stuck in football country, and then here was this other world, where you had to be an outcast to be a hero, and the only thing more addictive than heroin is heroism, and I was a junkie; I shot these crazy dreams into my veins: youngest writer to work at Marvel, at DC; to start his own indie label, next Stan Lee; epic movie deals—not the essential comic book artist of his generation, but the essential artist, a mash-up of Shakespeare and Picasso.





And of course, that's not what happened. As I reached each stop along my hero's journey, something much less Joseph Campbell happened. Marvel wasn't interested, DC wasn't interested, indie labels are a lot of fucking work, and as I watched the distance between what my life was supposed to be and what it actually was grow wider every day, I did what we all do: I took the thing that was supposed to happen and stuffed it in that closet in our minds where we hide such things.

And I allowed myself a grittier (though, of course, still very heroic) narrative: the greatest undiscovered artist of his generation; but see, even that story requires you create art you can stand to fucking look at, so that got stuffed in the closet, too; and of course, eventually that day comes—and I know it comes for all of us, but it really is worse for comic book writers—when you open that door in your mind but there's no more room and all the shit you were supposed to have done falls out and just buries you.

And that moment happened for me right as my girlfriend Anne, who I think it's important to note is a vegetarian and, oh, a yoga instructor, ran at me with a steak knife, presumably to kill me. Naturally, as we struggled with the knife, I took a moment to shove true love into that closet, but when I tried, that considerable larder of failures poured over me, and I realized the only way to keep from being buried was to bury this knife in the woman I loved—I really did love her—and what stopped me wasn't any last gasp of morality, no, what stopped me was my love's eyes changing from violence to wonder to greed.

Because in my hand was a solid gold steak knife.

At first she thought I was playing a magic trick on her, and I was like, yeah, 'cause I have so much free time to take a magic class, and she was like, well, maybe that's what you were doing when you say you're working, but then we stopped our usual circus act and took full stock of the miracle that had just happened.

I don't know if I should tell you about the feeling now. I think maybe later.

So, once Anne accepted it was real, she told me to do it again. I tried, but no matter how hard I summoned my powers, nothing. She then got the idea I needed to be angry for it to work, and proceeded to say some really nasty shit about me, which did make me angry but didn't turn anything to gold.

Because it's not anger that does it. It's that other feeling.

Anyway, the next month or two were actually pretty sweet: we had money for rent, and good booze, and quality pot; I mean, we were approximating something like happiness, though I wondered if part of it was her waiting for her goose to lay a golden egg.

But I couldn't, until one night we got in this huge fight at a bar, she stormed out, I got more wasted, and stumbled down the wrong fucking alley, and this man jumps me from behind a dumpster, and as I swung my whiskey bottle at his head, I felt that feeling come over me.

It was better than the first time: it felt like walking out of the water in the summer, cold and hot on your skin; or like when you can't come during sex and you're like what the fuck and then all of a sudden you do come, but it starts at your feet and then moves up your body like water boiling in a pot; or like if you were skydiving but instead of falling you were rising; the feeling is like that, kind of, and you can see everything in this precise fucking telescopic detail. I looked at the golden whiskey bottle in my hand and I could see down to each particular atom. I turned to look at the dude whose brain was bleeding into the asphalt and it was so fucking beautiful I burst into tears, and I'll tell you, that's why I did what I did. Not for the gold, but for that feeling of gold, that golden feeling.



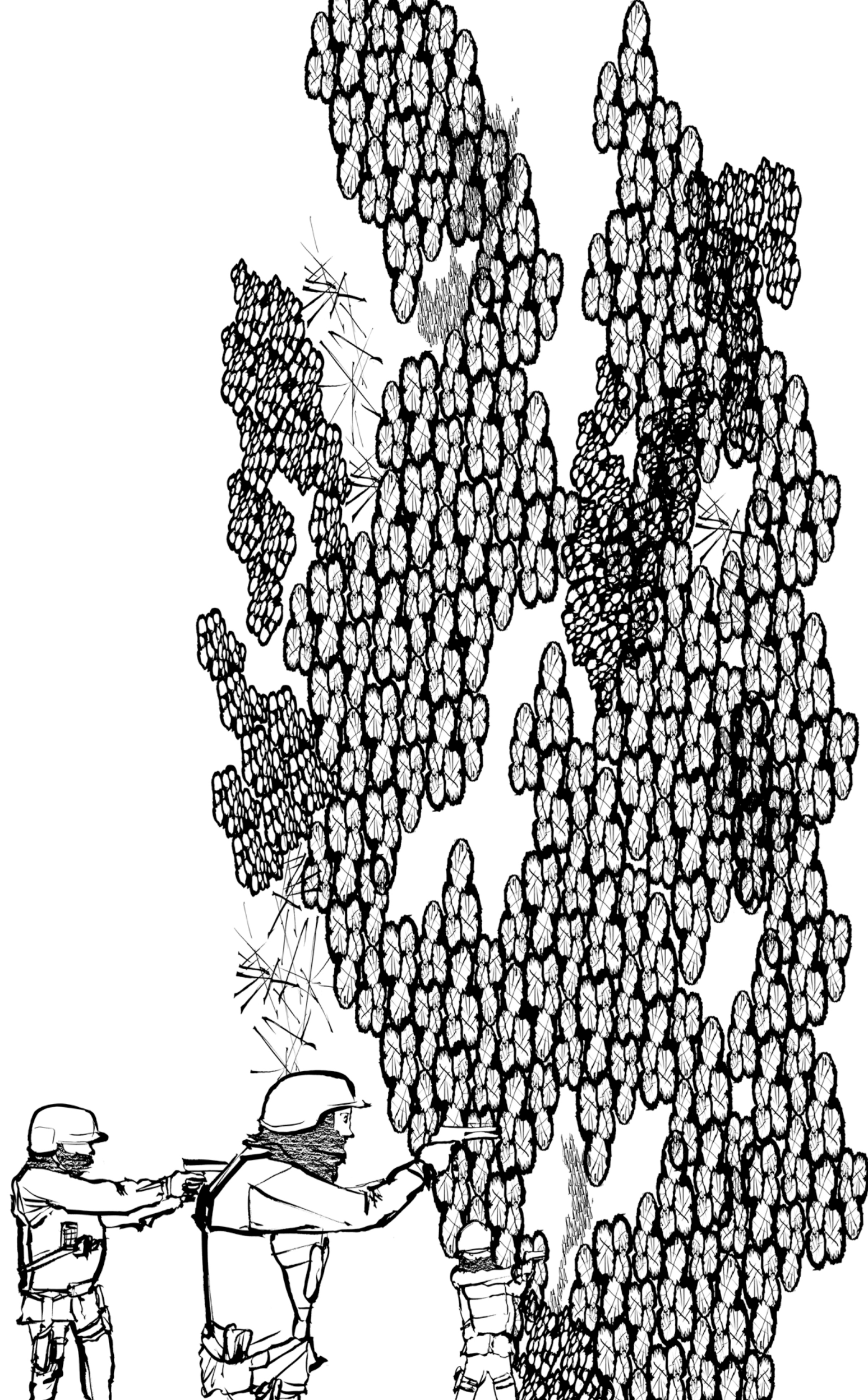
I sold the gold whiskey bottle and gave Anne and I another month of «happiness», but I was having trouble faking it, 'cause I'll tell you, when that feeling of gold leaves you it is just fucking emptiness, so yeah, I started looking for trouble, I went to places I knew I'd be attacked, and the funny thing is, in my head I wasn't chasing that feeling, I wasn't even being greedy: I was turning myself into a hero. I had this whole ludicrous fantasy that I would sell the gold I made from taking these bad guys down to make a Bruce Wayne-style mansion and buy myself some Batman gadgets and call myself Midas, or the Golden Hand, or some such shit.

But really I was just chasing that feeling.

Of course, the problem was I wasn't actually Batman, I didn't have fancy gadgets. So one night, when the one bad guy was joined by two more, and I was on the ground, their boots digging into my stomach, I grabbed onto an ankle and, oh, that feeling washed over me, better than ever before, 'cause I had turned one of those mother fucker villains into pure gold, and when his friends started screaming and running away I screamed, too, because it felt so fucking good, and I could see the stars in the city sky, I could see beyond the stars to the start of the universe, and when I looked back at this golden fucker in front of me he looked more than just beautiful, he looked just... like I had rendered the judgment of God on him and it was really good.

Well, now that I knew I could turn someone to gold just by touching them, what did I have to be afraid of? So now every night I went out, and the Golden Hand brought some beautiful fucking justice on the villains of the world, and I knew I was doing the work of a hero, because Anne saw it, too: suddenly she was sweet with me, crazy for me, but in this really pure way, like I really was a super hero rescuing her from... whatever, a lifetime of whatever; it was good, it was so good, that I started getting careless.

And so one afternoon, when I saw a villain steal a purse from this old lady, well, what kind of hero would I be?



And when I turn that evildoer into pure fucking gold I look up and see straight into the molten heart of the sun and I hear “put your hands over your head,” and a team of police officers are pointing their guns, terrified at me, and the thought of them shooting me, the fucking gall of these pigs standing in the way of a hero’s anointed rounds, sends this current of righteousness boiling up from my feet, out through my eyes, and I see into the fucking particle fabric of that officer; I see everything he was and is and could have been, and I judge him into pure gold, and not even the full force of that golden feeling keeps me from realizing what I’ve done, that I can turn someone into gold just by looking at them, and the two officers next to him are so scared they miss their one chance to stop me, and I turn them both to gold, and now the feeling is bubbling over in me like laughter, and I can’t stop, it’s all so funny: that fat woman walking the skinny dog, I perfect them both into gold, that skater kid sneaking his finger in his nose, gold, and I am a hero and I am an artist and everything is beautiful and everything is justice and no

one can run away fast enough, and when I hear my name behind me I don’t even need to look, I just think that golden feeling and the voice stops, and I turn around, understanding at last that I was put on this earth to save every last ugly soul into gold, and that’s just when I see her, Anne: her mouth, her golden mouth, her perfect golden mouth frozen in the middle of saying my name.

But it wasn’t her mouth, it wasn’t her golden eyes, frozen in that expression. It wasn’t her golden hands that could now never touch me. It was the fact that because she always refused to wear a belt, and because she never bought pants that quite fit her, and because she hated wasting money on new underwear, that I could see a frayed pair of old underwear sticking forever over her pants that sucked every last bit of gold out of me.

And then someone hit me on the head and here I am, and now you want me to use my powers for good, which means whatever you want.

But I’m telling you, you really don’t know what you’re asking me to do.

