The Five Incarnations Of King Midas As He Attempts To Right His Wrongs

A Play in Five (Brief) Vignettes

Dramatis Personae

KING MIDAS (M), a small king in big clothing.

KING MIDAS AS AN OLDER MAN (M), may or may not be played by the same actor.

DOCTOR (M) a busy man, awaiting the publication of his first book.

VILLAGERS (M/F) at lease four and as many as six of them. Also play POOR MEN, AILING MEN, CORPSE, etc during PRESS DANCE (pt. II)

SOPHIA (F), a woman made out of dream-matter and a confidante. The embodied clear answers and difficult ambiguities of adult life. May also be played by a member of the VILLAGER chorus if need be, but should assume noticeably different characteristics as SOPHIA in the last scene.

A TEDDY BEAR (teddy bear, or other stuffed animal)
Notes for actors/directors:

(1) All stage directions should be taken as strong suggestions, but not necessarily commands.

(2) Have fun with the chocolate. I leave much of that up to you.

(3) The press dance, as written, represents one of many possible vignettes with a similar flavor. While the setting, basic events and arc of rising action should remain as consistent as possible with the text, events do not have to happen in the exact order or exact manner written.
I. The Doctor

*MIDAS*, a youth between ten and fourteen, sits center on his throne. He holds a TEDDY BEAR. Next to him, a doctor.

*Melancholy.*

*MIDAS:* Sometimes I just feel like I’m a real asshole.

*DOCTOR:* Does this remind you of your relationship with any male in your family?

*MIDAS:* *(an insight)* I forgot to get the mail today! *(Melancholy).* See? When we split up duties in the flat I sassed my roommates. I sassed them. “Alright, Midas” head roommate said. “This week you have the mail duties.” “Fuck you,” I thought. “For thinking you have the right to assign me the mail duties.” And what do I do, a day after they assign me mail duties? I forget the mail.

*DOCTOR (feverishly taking notes):* Does this remind you of any childhood flight of fancy you shared with your brothers in the dark?

*MIDAS:* And I’m always judging women for their weight, even when they have totally reasonably sized bellies. Jesus, it’s not like I ever make it to the gym.

*DOCTOR (even more feverishly taking notes):* Does this remind you of any incident from your first three years of life, perhaps in a country garden by the sea?

*MIDAS:* Here’s the worst thing. *(He leans in closer, toward the Doctor, as if confiding a secret)* I have this weird thing about breath. When I’m...doing the thing with a girl. It’s like I can’t even kiss her if I can taste any kind of recognizable food on her breath. It will be going great but then I’ll catch a whiff of pesto or something and—whoopsidaisy!—no more. Nothing. Night’s over. And do you think I carry around breath-mints and worry about my own breath? Hell no. My breath stinks. God, I’m such an asshole! *(A beat, the doctor stops scrawling. Then, cautiously)* Can you give me anything, for any of this?

*A beat.* The doctor turns around the notepad. On it, he has drawn a picture of a chocolate bar. He starts to laugh, suddenly and violently. As if getting a joke, Midas begins to laugh as well. They continue, move toward each other, slap each other on the backs. A raucous good time. Laughter continues, escalates uncomfortably. Sudden blackout. Silence.
II. The Press Dance

Camera flashes and carnival music. MIDAS is in front of an audience of VILLAGERS, performing tricks for an audience. He can turn things into chocolate, and does so. First, he transforms other foods: a cup of water into chocolate milk, a glass of wine into cocoa. Then, objects: a telephone, a wristwatch. Finally, the audience presents him with living things: A rabbit, a mouse. All are made into chocolate, and he eats each as he performs the ritual. As the performance continues, he appears to get more and more full and enjoys himself less and less. Each watcher in the crowd nearly bursts from excitement. They approach him as one might approach the Pope. A POOR MAN comes with his child, tall and gaunt, holding a sign that begs for food. He bows before MIDAS and takes off his shoes. He hands the shoes to MIDAS. They promptly turn into chocolate. The MAN takes one for himself, and gives the other to MIDAS to consume. MIDAS begins to eat it, but before he can finish, an AILING MAN approaches, with an extra limb. The man entreats MIDAS to cure him. MIDAS turns the limb into chocolate. It pops off and the AILING MAN hands it to MIDAS, gesturing for him to eat it and watching as he does. MIDAS takes bites, slowly, painfully. As dread passes over his features, a pair of MEN approach with the CORPSE of their brother. They present it before MIDAS. Approaching despair, he touches it, as if to resurrect. As he does, the whole crowd swarms around him so he cannot be seen. Each one has a separate deformity, only now visible—a third eye, a broken arm, a festering face-sore, etc. They chatter loudly like birds, the music increases to deafening heights. Their dance envelops MIDAS. Chocolate splatters everywhere. Then, silence. They leave the stage and return as VILLAGERS, or maybe simply lose their deformities and remain onstage.

III. The Villagers

MIDAS, still a boy of ten to twelve, sits enthroned, center, covered in chocolate and surrounded by discarded wrappers, gnawing away at a sizeable hunk of chocolate. His gaze is blank, defeated, his clothes and shirt stained with the vestiges of a gluttonous, candy-splattered afternoon. Camera flashbulbs continue to flicker, but less enthusiastically. A CHORUS OF VILLAGERS surrounds him, telling a story to the audience. Absorbed in his chocolate hunk, he remains only vaguely aware of their activity.

CHORUS OF VILLAGERS: Have you heard of Midas, the Great Child King?

VILLAGER ONE: Have you heard of his magic chocolate touch?

VILLAGER TWO: I heard that he took a bike ride across the Brooklyn Bridge, then fed a thousand hungry widows with the chocolate paving after his feet touched the road at Tillary Street.

VILLAGER THREE: I heard he went parachuting through the skies of a warzone and rode every missile like a bicycle, till it rained chocolate on the soldiers below and they all put on bathing suits and danced!
VILLAGER FOUR: I heard he once made his grandma a fantastic chocolate milkshake, and it wasn’t even on mother’s day!

The crowd goes wild. MIDAS, still only vaguely cognizant of the VILLAGERS, finishes his chocolate bar, tosses the wrapping paper to the side and begins on another.

VILLAGER THREE: I heard that one time, King Midas fell in lo-ove! (The villagers snickers)

VILLAGER TWO: With a woman who was made of chocolate!

VILLAGER ONE: No, stupid. It wasn’t a chocolate woman! (VILLAGER TWO is profoundly embarrassed. The others comfort her). It was a real woman, made of hair and skin and grimy toenails. And her name was Sophia.

The VILLAGERS whisper her name feverishly, chatter among themselves. Downstage left, she appears, tall and beautiful, a tender woman in her late middle ages, facing MIDAS. He looks up, notices her, is dumbfounded.

VILLAGER TWO: She came from somewhere far away, over the sea

VILLAGER ONE: And when he saw her he knew

VILLAGER THREE: That he wanted to hold her flavor between his lips.

SOPHIA approaches the throne. MIDAS watches her. They move toward each other as the VILLAGERS, after a moment’s silence, turn inward to each other and begin gossiping rapidly about MIDAS further adventures.

VILLAGER TWO: I heard he put up ads on the sides of busses welcoming anyone who was feeling slightly lonely or inexplicably sad or anxious about nothing much in particular to read chocolate books with him under his chocolate bedcovers.

VILLAGER THREE (overlapping): I heard that he performed a chocolate sonata on the violin in front of a packed house in Prague. The whole crowd cried cocoa tears and lame orphans walked again.

VILLAGER FOUR (overlapping): I heard once that Midas built himself an airplane out of chocolate, then crashed it into sea in hopes that he might melt into the ocean with it and sugar-frost the beaches when the tide came in from here to the Philippines.

They devolve into rapid, chaotic, overlapping stories. Then:
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MIDAS (suddenly): No! Don’t you understand? (The villagers fall silent, dumbfounded. MIDAS gives SOPHIA a long, hard look) I’ve done nothing. I've sat alone and eaten. I didn’t want any of this.

The villagers pick up their things and leave. MIDAS stands alone, across the stage from SOPHIA.

IV. The Love

MIDAS is a full-grown man. He faces SOPHIA.

MIDAS: Where were you?

SOPHIA: What do you mean, Midas? I---

MIDAS: Where were you this whole time?

SOPHIA: (a beat) Right here.

MIDAS: No you weren't! (Suddenly angry, he tips over his throne) You weren’t, because I was here. I was here this whole time, wiling away the hours with sweets and ailing men and all I needed was for you to be here but you didn’t appear!

SOPHIA: Oh, Midas. (She approaches him, lets him fall into her lap, where he rests. He begins to weep).

MIDAS: If I touch you with my bare skin, you'll be chocolate too.

SOPHIA (stroking his back): Shhhh. Don't worry about that.

MIDAS: I thought that you’d never have to worry about what people said about you when you could turn things into chocolate.

SOPHIA: Oh, my poor little boy...

MIDAS: I thought being able to turn things into chocolate gave you license to spend a little bit of time enjoying yourself. Who knew the world had such a use for someone who could turn things into chocolate?

SOPHIA: The world has a use for all children, Midas. Surely you know that.

MIDAS: I know. I just feel like sometimes... (he sighs). Did I ever tell you about my first kiss?

SOPHIA: Yes, Midas. (He looks dismayed). But you can tell it again if it will make you feel better.
MIDAS: I think I left out some details last time, or maybe whole bits of the story altogether. (*The lights begin to dim. Crickets, like dusk around a campfire*) I was thirteen and it was at a camp back in Vermont. She was named Melissa. I don’t even really remember what she looks like any more, but at the time...well, at the time I thought she was completely perfect. Short, with black hair. Skin the color of coffee. To hell with every movie star, I thought. I’ve got the most wonderful girl in the world right here with me, and she’s not even a cabin away! (*He smiles, a beat*) We were in the same team for beach volleyball. And I--wasn’t very good. So I kind of clowned around whenever I got the chance, to make up for it. And she laughed at my jokes. And one day after volleyball she walked with me on the way back to cabin and...well, one thing led to another and soon as I knew it we were under a birch tree after dark one night and without thinking my lips were against hers.

SOPHIA: And how did it make you feel?

MIDAS (*thinks for a minute*): Okay, I guess. Okay. But not great, *certainly* nothing like I thought it would feel like. For one thing, it was less...smooth than I expected. And for another...I don’t know. You’re going to think I’m crazy for saying this.

SOPHIA: I won’t think you’re crazy for saying anything, Midas.

MIDAS (*smiling back*): Well, I dunno. It felt...too moist. And too breathy. I mean, the first moment we kissed was fine, but after that there was this sense like “what now?” And she was a *toothy* kisser. And I opened my eyes for a lot of it, and her face looked kind of funny from down below...I mean, *everyone’s* does. But it just seemed like this weird, mutual feeding ritual. And we were thirteen, so it’s not like we even knew how to do anything else. So we just kind of stood there, and covered each other in saliva and clunked our teeth together. And we didn’t know what to do with our limbs, and then, after we got tired, we just went inside.

*A beat. MIDAS is surprising himself with how upset the recollection of the anecdote makes him. SOPHIA notices the changes in mood.*

Something stuck with me from that first kiss, for *years*. Something had ended, you know? The prospect of kissing someone...it wasn’t this mythical thing any more. Both of our salivas tasted funny. I could taste my own *breath* kissing her. We were just so...human. More than that; we were just bones and teeth and mouths.

*SOPHIA has grown sad, looks at MIDAS with pity. He looks back and meets her gaze.*

Can you remind me? That I’m human?

*Gently and deliberately, SOPHIA allows MIDAS to kiss her on the lips. She turns into chocolate, stands there, center stage as a frozen chocolate statue. MIDAS gets up from her lap. Maybe he sheds a tear.*
V. The Doctor II

The DOCTOR steps forth, with the MIDAS’ TEDDY BEAR in tow. He puts his hand on older MIDAS’ shoulder, crumbles into a pile of cocoa bits. Out of the rubble, Midas stoops down and looks at the BEAR. The two share a sad knowing look. THE BEAR makes his peace. A touch, or maybe a long sustained hug. The BEAR turns into chocolate. MIDAS leaves him uneaten and, with a long peaceful look, exits stage left.

Curtain.