



Long, long ago, when this old world was in its tender infancy, there was a Titan named Epimetheus. So that he might not be lonely, Zeus sent a female to be his playfellow and helpmate. Her name was Pandora.

The first thing that Pandora saw when she entered the cottage where Epimetheus lived was a great box. And almost the first question that she put to him was, “Epimetheus, what have you in that box?”

“My dear little Pandora,” answered Epimetheus, “that is a secret, and you must be kind enough not to ask any questions about it. The box was left here to be kept safely, and I do not myself know what it contains.”

It is thousands of years since the myths tell us that Epimetheus and Pandora lived; and the world nowadays is a very different sort of place from what it was then. There were no fathers or mothers to take care of the children because there was no danger or trouble of any kind, and no clothes to be mended, and there was always plenty to eat and drink. Whenever a child wanted his dinner, he found it growing on a tree. It was a very pleasant life indeed. No labor had to be done, no tasks studied, all was sport and dancing and the sweet voices of children talking, or caroling like birds, or laughing merrily all day long.

But Pandora was not altogether happy on account of Epimetheus’ explanation about the box.

“Where can it have come from?” she continually asked herself, “and what on earth can be inside it?” At last, she spoke her mind to Epimetheus.

“You might open the box,” Pandora said, “and then we could see its contents for ourselves.”

“Pandora, what are you thinking of?” Epimetheus exclaimed. And his face expressed so much horror at the idea of looking into the box, which had been given him on condition that he never open it, that Pandora thought it best not to suggest the idea ever again. Still, she could not help thinking and talking about it.

“At least,” she said, “you can tell me how it came here.”

“It was left at the door,” Epimetheus replied, “just before you came and by a person who looked very intelligent and who could hardly keep from smiling as he set it down. He was dressed in an odd kind of a cloak, and had on a cap that seemed to be made partly of feathers so that it looked as if it had wings.”

“What sort of a staff did he have?” asked Pandora.

“Oh, the most curious staff that you ever saw!” cried Epimetheus. “It was like two serpents twisting around a stick, and was carved so naturally that I, at first, thought the serpents were alive.”

“I know him,” said Pandora thoughtfully. “Nobody else has such a staff. It was Hermes, and he brought me here as well as the box. No doubt he intended it for me, and most probably it contains pretty dresses for me to wear, or games for us both, or something nice for us to eat.”

“Perhaps so,” answered Epimetheus, turning away, “but until Hermes comes back and gives his permission, neither of us has any right to lift the lid.”

One day not long after that, Epimetheus went to gather figs and grapes by himself without inviting Pandora to join him. Ever since she had arrived, he’d heard about that box, nothing but the box, and he was tired of it. And as soon as he was gone, Pandora kneeled down on the floor and looked intently at it.

It was made of a beautiful kind of wood, and was so highly polished that Pandora could see her face in it. The edges and corners were carved with most wonderful skill. Around the edge, there were figures of graceful men and women and the prettiest children ever seen, reclining or playing in gardens and forests. The most beautiful face of all was done in high relief in the center of the box. There was nothing else except the dark, rich smoothness of the wood and this one face with a garland of flowers about its brow. The features had a kind of mischievous expression with all their loveliness and if the mouth had spoken it would probably have said, “Do not

be afraid, Pandora! What harm can there be in opening a box? Never mind that poor, simple Epimetheus. You are wiser than he and have ten times as much courage. Open the box and see if you do not find something very pretty.”

And on this particular day, when Pandora was alone, her curiosity grew so great that at last she touched the box. She was more than half determined to open it if she could.

First, however, she tried to lift it. It was heavy, much too heavy for the slender strength of a child like Pandora. She raised one end of the box a few inches from the floor, and then let it fall with a loud thump. A moment after, she almost thought that she heard something stir inside the box. She was not quite sure whether she heard it or not, but her curiosity grew stronger than ever. Suddenly her eyes fell on a curious knot of gold that tied it. She took it in her fingers and, almost without intending it, she was soon busily engaged in trying to undo it.

It was a very intricate knot indeed, but at last, by the merest accident, Pandora gave the cord a kind of twist and it unwound itself, as if by magic. The box was now without a fastening.

“This is the strangest thing I ever knew,” Pandora said. “What will Epimetheus say? And how can I possibly tie it again?”

And then the thought came into her naughty little heart that, since she would be suspected of looking into the box, she might as well do so at once.

As Pandora raised the lid of the box, the cottage was suddenly darkened, for a black cloud had swept across the sun and seemed to have buried it alive. There had, for a little while past, been a low growling and grumbling which all at once broke into a heavy peal of thunder. But Pandora heeded nothing of all this. She lifted the lid nearly upright and looked inside. It seemed as if a sudden swarm of winged creatures brushed past her, taking flight out of the box while, at the same time, she heard the voice of Epimetheus in the doorway exclaiming as if he was in pain, “Oh, I am stung! I am stung! No, Pandora! Why have you opened this wicked box?”

Pandora let fall the lid and looked up to see what had befallen Epimetheus. The thundercloud had so darkened the room that she could not clearly see what was in it. But she heard a frightening buzz, as if a great many huge flies or giant bees were darting about. And as her eyes grew accustomed to the dimness, she saw a crowd of ugly little shapes, looking very spiteful, and having bats’ wings and terribly long stingers in their tails. It was one of these that had strung Epimetheus. Nor was it long before Pandora herself began to cry. An odious little monster had settled on her forehead, and would have stung her very deeply if Epimetheus had not run and

brushed it away.

The ugly things that made their escape out of the box were the whole family of earthly Troubles. There were evil Passions. There were a great many species of Cares. There were more than a hundred and fifty Sorrows. There were Diseases in a vast number of strange and painful shapes. There were more kinds of Pain than it would be of any kind of use to talk about. In short, everything that has since afflicted the souls and bodies of mankind had been shut up in the mysterious box given to Epimetheus and Pandora to be kept safely in order that the happy children of the world might never be accosted by them. Had they been faithful to their trust all would have gone well; no grown person would ever have been sad, nor any child have had cause to shed a single tear.

But it was impossible that they could keep the ugly swarm in their own little cottage. Pandora flung open the windows and doors to try and get rid of them and, sure enough, away flew the winged Troubles and so pestered and tormented the people everywhere that none of them so much as smiled for many days afterward. And the children of the earth, who before had seemed ageless, now grew older, day by day, and came soon to be youths and maidens, and men and women, and then old folks, before they dreamed of such a thing.

Meanwhile, Pandora and Epimetheus remained in their cottage, where both of them had been painfully stung. Epimetheus sat down sullenly in a corner with his back to Pandora. As for poor little Pandora, she flung herself upon the floor and rested her head on the fatal box. She was crying as if her heart would break. Suddenly, there was a gentle little tap on the inside of the lid.

“What can that be?” cried Pandora, lifting her head. But Epimetheus was too much out of humor to answer her. Again, the tap! It sounded like the tiny knuckles of a tiny hand.

“Who are you?” asked Pandora. “Who are you inside of this dreadful box?”

A sweet little voice came from within saying, “Only lift the lid and you shall see.”

“No, no,” answered Pandora, “I have had enough of lifting the lid. You need never think that I shall be so foolish as to let you out.” And, true to her word, Pandora left the box sealed, burying it far beneath the soil. Only one spirit remained trapped in the box. That spirit was called Hope.

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