

Pandora's Box

Long ago, at a time when the world was new, men lived contented. They all had plenty to eat and the sun shone every day on lush fields and orchards.

Now there was a man called Epimetheus who had lots of friends but longed for a wife to share his life with. One day, there was a knock at his door. When Epimetheus opened it he couldn't believe his eyes. There, standing on his doorstep, was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"Are you looking for someone?" he asked, trying hard not to stare.

"My name is Pandora," said the woman. "The Gods have sent me here to look after a man called Epimetheus."

"Then you're looking for me," said Epimetheus, smiling. "Why don't you come in?"

Inside the house, Pandora looked around. She couldn't help being curious. It was a nice home but it was in such a mess. There was a lot of work to be done. She tidied up the kitchen and washed the dirty clothes. Then she cooked a delicious meal. Epimetheus was very impressed.

"Where did you learn to cook like this?" he asked.

Pandora smiled. "I don't know," she said. "I can't remember anything about my past. All I know is the Gods sent me here to look after you."

Epimetheus couldn't help but think this was all a little bit strange, but who was he to grumble about having a beautiful woman to take care of him? While he ate, Pandora went from room to room, opening all the chests and cupboards.

"You are a very curious girl," said Epimetheus.

In the cellar she found more chests but one looked very different from all the others. The wood was very shiny and the lid was held down with a rope.

"Where did you get this lovely chest?" she called up to Epimetheus.

"It was sent by the Gods, just like you," Epimetheus told her. "But don't touch it. I was told never to open it."

Pandora thought, what's the point of having a chest you can't open? What on earth could be inside it? It must be very special.

Then something bizarre happened. Pandora thought she could hear voices coming from inside the chest.

"Pandora, help us, let us out," they called. "Let us out!" Pandora looked puzzled.

Then she heard a knock on the door upstairs. It was Epimetheus's brother.

"Come and meet Pandora," she heard Epimetheus say. "She was sent to me as a gift from the Gods."

"Another gift from the Gods?" said his brother. "Be careful, I think the Gods might be trying to trick us."

"How can Pandora be part of a punishment? She's the best thing that's ever happened to me."

"Perhaps the Gods are angry with us? Perhaps they want to seek revenge for something we have done," his brother replied.

"Don't be so foolish," said Epimetheus. "They are just little gifts, don't fret."

But perhaps poor Epimetheus should have fretted. That night Pandora lay awake on her bed. She just couldn't stop thinking about that chest. She thought she could hear the voices beckoning her from the cellar.

"Pandora, help us! Let us out! Let us out!"

Pandora remembered what Epimetheus had told her, but the voices were getting louder and louder and louder.

"Please Pandora! Set us free!"

Slowly, silently, Pandora made her way down to the cellar.

"Just one little peep," she said to herself. "One little peep won't hurt, then I'll close the chest – for ever."

Carefully, she undid the rope. Slowly, she lifted the lid. There was chuckling inside the chest, then the lid flew back and thousands and thousands of dark shadows swarmed into the cellar. They flitted around, buzzing and hissing.

The noise woke Epimetheus up and he quickly ran downstairs to the cellar.

"Oh no!" he cried when he saw the chest open and the shadows everywhere. "Pandora, what have you done?"

"Something got out," whispered Pandora. "It wasn't my fault, I only opened the lid a little."

Epimetheus looked around him in horror. The shadows were curses sent by the Gods to punish people for the things they had done wrong.

Pandora felt awful. She tried to close the box again but it was no use.

Just then, she noticed one tiny creature left inside.

"Who are you?" asked Pandora.

"I am Hope," said the creature. "I sneaked into the box when the Gods weren't looking. My job is to undo the work of the nasty curses."

Gently, Pandora took Hope outside and watched it flutter away on the air.

"Remember," it called back to Pandora. "Wherever there is trouble, I will be there to help."

Some people say that Hope is still flying around the world, bringing help to those who need it.