

Pandora

from *I Am Arachne*

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Adapted by Fishtank Staff



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Flies! Wasps! Mosquitoes!
Measles! Mumps! Chicken pox!
Hunger! Thirst! Cold!
Doubt! Greed! Despair!
Poverty! Plague! War!

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED why the world is so full of suffering, big and small? Well, some say I'm to blame for everything. That's right, me, Pandora, whose name means "the gift of all." I was fashioned by the gods in heaven to be as beautiful as Aphrodite, then sent down to earth to marry Epimetheus, the brother of Prometheus. Zeus even gave me a wedding present—a beautiful box, locked, with a golden key.

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But it was all a trick. You see, Zeus was angry at Prometheus for stealing fire from heaven and giving it to men on earth. So he decided to punish humankind. Prometheus warned Epimetheus *never* to accept a gift from Zeus. But the minute Epimethes saw me, he couldn't turn me away.

But was it fair, I ask you, for Zeus to tell me I must *never* open that mysterious box? I remember his words exactly.

"Pandora," Zeus said. "I want you to take this box down to earth. And whatever you do, *don't look inside.*"

"Why not?" I brazenly asked.

"Impertinent girl!" scolded Zeus. "Just do what I say, and don't ask questions!"

Well, I'm no more curious than the next person. What would you have done? My first few days on earth, I resisted the temptation to open the box, though it filled my waking thoughts and dreams. Oh, occasionally, I'll admit, when my husband was sleeping, I'd take the box down from the shelf and gently shake it.

And when I did, I heard a strange hum, which only made me more curious. It sounded like a choir of mosquitos, flat and off-key, singing to me, only to me. Finally I couldn't stand it anymore. I just *had* to see what was inside.

I took the key (I wore it on a gold chain around my neck) and slipped it into the keyhole. But the minute the key touched the lock, sparks began to fly! A puff of black smoke filled the room, and the lid snapped open with a *crack!*, as if lightning had struck.

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Then, horror of horrors, a swarm of dark buzzing things flew out—ten thousand or so—screeching and humming. They bit my arms and legs and, like a bunch of harpies, hissed terrible things in my car:

"You stupid, evil girl!"

"Why, what possessed you?"

"Now you're in trouble!"

"Wait until Zeus hears what you did!"

"Beauty can't get you out of this one, Pandora."

"Ha! 'The gift of all.' We'll see about that."

Frightened, I began to cry. But after a few minutes, the air began to clear. The worst of them—Hunger, Plague, War, and Despair—flew out the window, to where I didn't know. (I found out later they spread to all four corners of the globe.)

And that's when I saw Hope cowering at the bottom of the box, holding its gossamer wings over its ears, trying to drown out the terrible things it had heard.

Now, Hope is a hard thing to describe, but I'll try. Hope flutters like a bird, is clear as spring water, and as constant as a star. Without Hope, our hearts would be heavy as lead. How Hope had stood being locked up in a box with that vile crowd, I'll never know.

Afraid that Hope, too, might escape, I quickly snapped the lid shut. Who knew what Doubt and Despair would do to Hope out in the world?

Sometimes now, I listen at the keyhole and hear Hope singing in the dark. Its voice is high and clear, as if an inch-high angel were singing a solo.

*I am Hope,
I'm white and true.
Believe me
When I tell you,
All pain will cease,
The worst night end.
I'm Hope,
Unfailing friend!*

Knowing that Hope is with me, I feel better about what happened. Everyone makes mistakes, right? I think—no, I *hope!*—that despite the suffering I've caused, everything will turn out all right in the end.

I'll never give up Hope. It's my one consolation, and it's yours, too. Anytime you want to borrow Hope, you can. Just keep it close to your heart, and don't let it fly off!