

# ***The Paradise of Children***

by Nathaniel Hawthorne (/author/nathaniel-hawthorne)

***The Paradise of Children** is Hawthorne's tale about the wickedly curious Pandora, who shouldn't have looked inside that box! Published in the 1920 collection, **Wonder Stories: The Best Myths for Boys and Girls**, edited by Carolyn Sherwin Bailey.*

Long, long ago, when this old world was in its tender infancy, there was a child named Epimetheus who never had either father or mother; and that he might not be lonely, another child, fatherless and motherless like himself, was sent by the gods 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 this,

"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[Pg 23] now-a-days 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 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.

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"Where can it have come from?" she continually asked herself, "and what on earth can be inside it?" At last she spoke 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 a box, which had been given him on condition that he never open it, that Pandora thought it best not to suggest it[Pg 24] any more. 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 smiling and 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 had he?" 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 Mercury, 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 toys for us both, or something nice for us to eat."

"Perhaps so," answered Epimetheus, turning away, "but until Mercury comes back and gives[Pg 25] his permission, we have neither of us any right to lift the lid."

One day not long after that Epimetheus went to gather figs and grapes by himself without asking Pandora. Ever since she had come he had 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 centre of the box. There was nothing else save 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[Pg 26] 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 pretty loud thump. A moment afterward 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 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 quite over 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! Naughty 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 [Pg 28] clearly see what was in it. But she heard a disagreeable buzzing, 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 stings in their tails. It was one of these that had strung Epimetheus. Nor was it a great while after 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.

Now, if you wish to know what these ugly things were that made their escape out of the box, I must tell you that they 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 Naughtiness 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 [Pg 29]Pandora to be kept safely in order that the happy children of the world might never be molested by them. Had they been faithful to their trust all would have gone well with them. No grown person would ever have been sad, nor any child have had cause to shed a single tear, from that hour until this moment.

But it was impossible that the two children should 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 about 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, the naughty Pandora and Epimetheus remained in their cottage. 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[Pg 30] 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 fairy's 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."

"Ah," said the sweet little voice again, "you had much better let me out. I am not like those naughty creatures that have stings in their tails. They have no relation to me as you would soon find out if you would only lift the lid."

Indeed, there was a kind of cheerful witchery in the tone that made it almost impossible to [Pg 31]refuse anything which this little voice asked. Pandora's heart had grown lighter at every word that came from the box. Epimetheus, too, had left his corner and seemed to be in better spirits.

"Epimetheus!" exclaimed Pandora, "come what may, I am resolved to lift the lid."

"And as the lid seems very heavy," said Epimetheus, running across the room, "I will help you."

So, with one consent, the two children lifted the lid. Out flew a sunny and smiling little personage and hovered about the room, throwing light wherever she went. Have you ever made the sunshine dance into dark corners by reflecting it from a bit of looking glass? Well, so appeared the winged cheerfulness of this fairylike stranger amid the gloom of the cottage. She flew to Epimetheus and laid the least touch of her finger on the inflamed spot where the Trouble had stung him and immediately the pain of it was gone. Then she kissed Pandora on the forehead and her hurt was cured likewise.

"Who are you, beautiful creature?" asked Pandora.

"I am to be called Hope," explained the sunshiny figure, "and because I am such a cheerful person, I was packed by the gods into the box to make amends for the swarm of ugly Troubles. Never fear! We shall do pretty well in spite of them."

"Your wings are colored like the rainbow," exclaimed Pandora, "How beautiful!"








"And will you stay with us," asked Epimetheus, "forever and ever?"

"As long as you need me," said Hope, "and that will be as long as you live in the world. I promise never to desert you."

So Pandora and Epimetheus found Hope, and so has everybody else who has trusted her since that day. The Troubles are still flying around the world, but we have that lovely and lightsome fairy, Hope, to cure their stings and make the world new for us.



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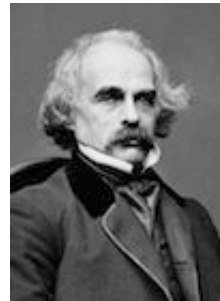
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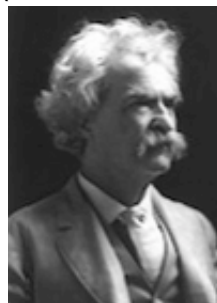
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