

# Pandora

BARBARA McBRIDE-SMITH

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Have you ever been making up your bed or fluffing up your pillow, and you came across one of those little tags that reads: UNDER PENALTY OF LAW—DO NOT REMOVE? And you thought to yourself, “Who says? This is my pillow. I can rip this sucker off right now. Are the Pillow Police gonna come in here and arrest me if I do?”

Well, that must have been how Pandora felt about that box. The box had been a wedding present from Papa Zeus. It was a beautiful box, covered with gold and inlaid with jewels. It had a heavy lid held shut by a lock. And underneath that lock there was a tag. It read: UNDER PENALTY OF LAW—DO NOT REMOVE. And Pandora probably said to herself, “Who says? This is *my* box. Papa Zeus gave it to me. Why wouldn’t he want me to look inside it?”

You see, Pandora had a problem.

It had all started years and years ago as a feud between Papa Zeus and the Metheus brothers. You remember the Metheus brothers. There was Pro—Prometheus. He was the oldest and the smartest. And then there was Epi—Epimetheus. He wasn’t the sharpest knife in the drawer, but he was real proud of his big brother. He used to say, “This here’s my bro Pro. He’s the brains in the family.”

The Metheus boys were Titans, but they lived right alongside the mortals from time to time. They were fond of the mortals and liked to give them presents. That made the mortals worship the ground they walked on. One day Pro decided to give the mortals a present like they had never had before—fire! With fire they could warm their feet and eat cooked meat. The problem was, the only fire that existed was in Papa Zeus

barbecue pit up on Mount Olympus. So one evening while Zeus was out on an affair—of state—Pro slipped in the back gate and stole a red hot coal from the fire pit. He took it down and gave it to the mortals. Well, that made Pro a hero with the mortals, but it chapped ol' Zeus's hide.

And what did Papa Zeus do about it? He punished Prometheus by hanging him on the side of a mountain. Pro hung there all day long in the boiling hot sun. And he hung there all night long in the cold. Then in the wee hours of the morning an eagle flew up to him, sat down on Pro's face, and started to peck at his belly. She pecked and pecked until she plucked his liver plumb out. She swallowed it and took off. Poor ol' Pro had to hang there again all day long in the boiling hot sun and all night long in the cold. He was miserable, shivering, liverless. But he didn't die. He couldn't die because he was immortal. So that night he grew a brand new liver. And the next morning, the eagle was back. She plucked out that new liver, ate it, and took off again. Well, that same old routine went on day after day, month after month, year after year! That liver-loving eagle thought she had a standing invitation for breakfast.

Even after eons of time had gone by, Papa Zeus still wasn't satisfied that the Metheus brothers and their pals, the mortals, had gotten their fair share of punishment for stealing his fire. If there was one thing Zeus was good at, it was revenge. That was when Zeus hit upon the idea of making a *woman*. That's right, the first mortal woman! Up until then the whole world was inhabited by nothing but the good ol' boys. Not a woman amongst them. Not one. How their toilet paper rolls ever got changed is a mystery to me.

Zeus went to his son Phestus, the blacksmith, and asked him to design a creature that would drive the good ol' boys on the earth real crazy. What Phestus built was a woman. He made her strong and he made her beautiful. Zeus made her smart *and* he made her curious. Then Zeus named her Pandora, which means "gift to all."

You getting my drift here? It was a setup right from the start! Papa Zeus gave Pandora that beautiful box, the one covered with gold and inlaid with jewels, the one with the heavy lid and the lock and the little tag. You remember the one: UNDER PENALTY OF LAW—DO NOT REMOVE. Then he sent her off to find Epimetheus and marry up with him. The moment Epi laid eyes on Pandora, he was in love. So they got married. She promised to love, honor, and redecorate. And she got busy straightening out his sock drawer and his life.

For the first couple of weeks, Pandora was so busy being domestic she

didn't think much about that box. But when she figured out that housework was boring, she began to notice that box more and more. She took to dusting it every morning. She polished the jewels every afternoon. One day Epi came home from work early, and when she saw her fondling that box, he shoved it into the closet. "Whoeee, Pandy honey, don't mess with that box! That box is trouble with a capital T and that rhymes with P and that stands for . . . uh . . . for . . ."

"Pooney!" said Pandora. She wasn't scared of that box. She was curious about that box. And she went right on being curious.

As soon as Epi went back to work, she took that box out of the closet and put it on the coffee table. She read the tag under the lock again: UNDER PENALTY OF LAW—DO NOT REMOVE. And she said to herself, "How come I can't open this box? It's *my* box. What could possibly be in here that Papa Zeus wouldn't want me to see?" She commenced to stare at that box for hours each day. Her eyes would glaze over and her jaw would go slack. She'd even talk to that box. She began to look just like a TV soap opera addict. But that box held more troubles than a whole year's worth of "The Bold and the Beautiful," "The Young and the Restless," "All My Children," and "General Hospital" combined. Before long, Pandora was plumb eat up with curiosity. Why couldn't she just remove the lock, lift the lid, and have a tiny peek? She wouldn't take anything out of the box and lose it, for crying out loud!

Well, like I said before, Pandora was smart. So she finally figured it out. "Papa Zeus put that sign on the box so that nobody else would mess with it *but* me. After all, it was my present," she thought. "It's a lousy job," she chuckled, "but somebody's gotta do it." She ran out to the garage and got a crowbar. She popped off the lock, lifted up the lid, and . . . well, that's when it all hit the fan!

All the stuff that makes life miserable came jumping out of that box: Sickness, old age, anger, envy, and lust. Racism, sexism, terrorism, and tourism. Communism, and capitalism. Alcoholism, drug addiction, pornography, and censorship. War and bombs and nuclear waste. Cholesterol, hemorrhoids, PMS and the IRS. Ring-around-the-collar and the heartbreak of psoriasis. Oh yes, all of that stuff and much, much more came flying out of that box.

But there was one little misfit down at the bottom of the box. Her name was Hope. She really didn't want to join the others, but she felt an obligation to take a flying leap. Instead, she took a chance and yelled out, "Pandora! Get a grip, girlfriend! Shut the lid or I'm outta here!"

Just in the nick of time, Pandora got a grip on herself and slammed down the lid and Hope was kept safe in the box.

Under the circumstances, considering she was framed and all, I think Pandora did the best she could for us. You can blame her for your troubles if you want to. People have been giving her a bad rap for thousands of years. But when you're down-and-out and nothing else seems to help, just remember: there's always Hope. She's still there, waiting for you when you need her . . . deep inside. ∞



## The Wise Goddess: Athena

BETTY BONHAM LIES

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Of all his children, the gray-eyed Athena was Zeus's favorite. She alone was allowed to carry her father's thunderbolt and his great breastplate, called the Aegis. Athena was the only Olympian who was not born of a mother, but sprang directly from the head of Zeus, fully grown and dressed in armor.

Athena was the most complex of the twelve great Olympian gods and goddesses. As the goddess of war, she could perform mighty deeds of battle; at least twice she defeated the war god Ares. Yet war gave her no pleasure. She preferred peace, and would rather settle disputes by wise judgment than by fighting. In this, she was most unlike the wild Ares, who loved battle for its own sake, and was never happier than when he was slaughtering enemies or destroying cities. It was probably Athena's superior intelligence and strategy in battle that made her stronger than the war god with his mindless fury and love of bloodshed. In peacetime, she put off her armor to dress in graceful flowing robes. Although many of the gods desired to marry her, Athena chose to remain single.

Like all of the other deities, Athena took a deep interest in the affairs of mortals. But unlike many of them, she tended to use her power to make life better for those humans she cared for.

This is a typical gesture: Athena competed with Poseidon, the god of the seas, over a new settlement of people, which was destined to be one of the greatest cities in the history of the world. Which of them should become the patron<sup>1</sup> of the city, to be named after the winner? With the other gods and

<sup>1</sup> patron: guardian and protector