

Pandora and the Sickle Moon

A one-act play

by
Jessica Chipman

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DEDICATION

For Sara, Samantha H., Neil, Alex, and Samantha W.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Pandora, the first woman created by Greek gods, has opened a box releasing all the evils of humanity. She can't undo the deed so she decides her penance must be to observe the evil play out in the world. She serves as the audience's narrator in this tragic fairy tale told out of time and place. Pandora tells of Freya, a young princess who has been captured in a battle that killed her family. A classically evil queen, Skadaas, is plotting a way to stay in power. Her first-born son, Brono, does not speak and, therefore, cannot be king. Her second-born son, Vol, is an explorer who has no kingly aspirations, though his mother wishes otherwise. Both sons fall for Freya. Pandora frets about not being able to stop evil and considers her situation hopeless, yet through a climactic and surprising sacrifice, she realizes that Freya has taught her that hope will always remain. About 35 minutes.

AWARDS

Top award at the Iowa High School Speech Association One-Act Play Festival in 2008.

Top honors in the Minnesota State High School League Subsection One-Act Play Festival in 2012.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 3 w, and unlimited ensemble)

PANDORA: The first woman.

EVILS: The ensemble.

HOPE / FREYA: A princess turned servant.

SKADAAS: The queen.

VOL: The queen's second-born son.

BRONO: The queen's first-born son. He does not speak.

ANI: The queen's maidservant.

*Note on casting: When possible, preference should be given to deaf or hard of hearing actors when casting the role of Brono.

SETTING

The courtyard in front of a castle. There is a bench.

SFX

Haunting music sounds

Wild music

Mournful music

PROPS

Fabric for Evils

Items for whittling

Bucket and rag

Apple

Scrolls or maps

Vial

Small knife

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Haunting MUSIC. LIGHTS fade in on a large fabric draped across the stage. The fabric covers EVILS, who propel it into various amorphous shapes with their movement. PANDORA enters, her expression innocent. She is intrigued by the cloth. The closer she moves toward the cloth, the more violent the Evils' movement and sound grows. She reaches a hand out, then retracts it. When she can no longer bear her curiosity, Pandora wrenches the fabric away from the Evils within. They fly out at her, making noise and contorting their bodies, matching the now wild music. Aware that she has done something she cannot undo, Pandora races about the stage.)

PANDORA: No! Return! Go back, please! I beg you!

(The EVILS torment and tease her, then disappear. Silence. PANDORA returns to the fabric and lifts it, revealing HOPE, a youthful girl dressed in white. A moment, and then... BLACKOUT. When the lights return, Hope is gone and Pandora addresses the audience, the fabric in her hand.)

PANDORA: I was the first woman. The gods of craftsmanship knelt and gathered a handful of clay and one of water. They mixed them, creating me. They called me Pandora, which means "all-gifted." Yes. I imagine you've heard my name. It was I who released evil from its bindings, gave flight to its razored wings, and now we all must suffer. You may blame me. The fault is mine alone. "All-gifted," indeed. The day I released evil upon the world, shame poured like tar into my veins, burning from the inside out. That day, the full moon of my soul was plucked from the sky and ground into slivers of twilight. I smothered my own soul. With these two hands, made of water and earth. Now a sad sickle of moon remains, spinning from its silver string, eternally vibrating, where a whole soul once hung.

(EVILS enter, clawing and tearing at PANDORA.)

PANDORA: *(Cont'd. To EVILS.)* Leave me! Bring the queen and her sons. We will make quick work.

(EVILS exit.)

PANDORA: *(Cont'd. To the audience.)* I worry I will forever be at an impasse. My pain is so great that I would rather not live than have to see the pain I have caused destroying our world. Yet live I will. I must atone for my action, so I do penance of the self-inflicted kind. My daily chore in this purgatory is seeing my own transgression at work: I watch the evil play out. Think that's deranged, do you? I must do something to pay for my misdeed. And watching today's story will be no different, except that you lucky fools are here to witness the same. Who is deranged now? For today's story, I take you to a kingdom out of time and place. There is a queen.

(SKADAAS enters with an EVIL.)

PANDORA: *(Cont'd.)* Her name is Skadaas, and she waits for her second-born son, Vol, to return with news of her husband's victory in battle. Sadly... yes, here he is.

(VOL and an EVIL enter. Vol kneels.)

PANDORA: *(Cont'd.)* You see Vol kneeling at the battlefield grave of his father, the king. He will not return to Skadaas with good news. The queen's first-born son—

(BRONO and an EVIL enter. Brono sits and begins whittling.)

PANDORA: *(Cont'd.)* --sits here, beneath an olive tree in the courtyard. This is his favorite place to escape. His name is Brono. He has never spoken. There is one more.

(FREYA and an EVIL enter.)

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PANDORA: *(Cont'd.)* This is Freya, a princess from a rival kingdom who has been captured by the queen's guards in the same battle that killed the king. When asked whether she wanted to die with her kingdom or live without freedom, she chose a life of forced servitude. It seems we have something in common.

Here our story begins, and my penance sustains, for the sake of my sickle-mooned soul. And now I am, as you, a witness to the evil I have poisoned the world with. Be gentle with your judgment of me. Who among you would not have done the same?

(Any remaining EVILS enter and surround PANDORA as she exits. BRONO and FREYA exit. SKADAAS clutches a vial that hangs around her neck. She does not see VOL.)

VOL: Mother. *(SHE doesn't hear HIM.)* Mother.

SKADAAS: *(Startles.)* My, I've been flighty lately.

(THEY embrace.)

SKADAAS: *(Cont'd.)* My son, the soldier. Your father must be so proud. He will be close on your heels to spill all the details of your heroics.

VOL: No, Mother.

SKADAAS: I've decided to throw a feast in honor of your victory.

VOL: Mother—

SKADAAS: Perhaps the royal court could provide entertainment.

VOL: Mother, listen to me!

SKADAAS: How dare you speak to me in that manner?

VOL: Father is dead. He was killed in battle two days ago.

SKADAAS: A death in battle. I suppose that has valor. I had feared this, of course, when you didn't return as planned.

VOL: *(Holding back emotion.)* Mother, I tried to save him.

SKADAAS: My son will not shed tears at this crucial time for our kingdom. Do you know what this means? Our kingdom cannot be ruled by a woman, and now that your father has died, his first-born takes the throne.

VOL: Brono. I must tell Brono.

SKADAAS: That is, of course, unless the first-born is... limited.

VOL: How can you speak of such things when Father has just died?

SKADAAS: Anil!

(ANI enters.)

ANI: Your Highness?

SKADAAS: Tell the elders we must convene the royal court.

ANI: Yes, Highness. *(ANI exits.)*

SKADAAS: I will plead our case to allow you to take the throne, considering your brother's condition.

VOL: Me?

SKADAAS: They cannot refuse. With your bravery and intelligence, you will be the king your father never was, that your brother never can be! You, my son!

VOL: I've never desired to be king.

SKADAAS: Surely, you've seen this was the inevitable choice.

VOL: No. I'm a commander. I have a fleet of ships and a crowd of soldiers waiting for my next word. We're to set sail tomorrow at sunset.

SKADAAS: Very well. However, what will happen to Brono and me if you leave? If, God forbid, you wind up with the same fate as your father? *(VOL hesitates.)* We'll summon the court. *(VOL is silent.)* Vol?

(Pause.)

VOL: Yes, Mother.

SKADAAS: That's my son.

End of Freeview

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