

EPIMETHEA

*Stumble into Epimethea—the reckless—Pandora—Jar of Hope—
shades scuffle for the Jar of Hope*

The blindfold of darkness cloaked the air as we journeyed deeper still into the cold abyss. My master urged me to take caution, but to no avail, as I stumbled and fell into a pit hitherto unknown to me. Dazed, I looked before me to behold a chaos of shades in the craggy ditch riddled with potholes and stalagmites. The spirits sprinted hither and thither with no regard to the obstacles before them, uttering no sound. When they collided with impediments or other shades they continued their hectic exercise with apparent apathy for their misfortunes. Thus I came to realize the grotesque disfigurement of every spirit here: each one sported twin scars in place of eyes.

"I see no pattern to this chaos, nor what makes these shades run so," I remarked to Virgil as he descended to join me in the pit. Rather than answer, he simply frowned in anger.

"Your imprudence has led us here," he rebuked, "but, nevertheless, we must make use of this detour so that you may wholly experience this infernal place." Laying a hand upon my shoulder, my guide led me to a stone ridge amidst the storm of shades, and despite their lack of vision the spirits scattered like dust in the wind to avoid our approach.

Upon reaching our destination, I questioned my guide once more: "Master, for what reason have these shades been robbed of sight? Why do they run in such a way regardless of their condition?"

"They had no need to see what was before them," Virgil replied. "But now we are amidst them, so you may determine their predicament for yourself."

As we came to stand among the tumultuous crowd of sinners, none of them responded to our presence, and they persisted as though I was one of them. A single shade, that of a woman, stood apart from the rest, sobbing in spite of her companions' silence. I approached her cautiously, but she seemed to disregard my presence, or perhaps did not perceive it. Reaching her, I discerned a ceramic urn clutched in her arms.

"Who are you who sobs amidst the silent crowd?" I called to her. "Tell me who you are so that I may understand your suffering."

"Who calls?" she cried out, frantically searching for the source of my voice. "Do not deny me my solitude, for I alone bear the burden these shades about me carry. If not for my cursed jar this wretched place would hold no souls."

My leader gravely responded, "Behold Pandora, who unwittingly unleashed the sins of humanity. She now bears the jar that keeps Hope captive."

In response to Virgil's words, Pandora's wailing increased, and she placed her eyeless head in her hands out of despair. "No! The ghosts that slumbered in this jar so long ago were unknown to me. It was not my fault but that of the gods, who wrought me of the earth for the sole purpose of punishing mankind for Prometheus' theft of fire. As for me, I could never foresee what has happened since."

"And yet you are here," I noted. "Why have you been condemned in this way?"

"I was a tool of the divine, nothing more," she bitterly murmured. "How can I be blamed for the curiosity that burns within us all? Put anyone in the world above in my position, and the human condition would remain unchanged. Those who surround me now could have foreseen the

consequences of their actions and yet they chose to ignore them, so I should not be accused for what I did not know. But still I stand here holding humanity's last chance for redemption, a ghost trapped in ceramic."

"Who are the other blind shades, the ones who sprint so furiously?" I asked after a bewildered pause.

"Fools, every one of them," Pandora spat. "They forget that they have the power to ruin the lives of others. Here flies Icarus, who caused his father so much grief, and Gavriolo Princip, whose bullet plunged the world into war. Behind stumbles Andrew Jackson, who forced an entire people to traverse a trail of tears. None of these sinners considered how the stones they threw would ripple the waters."

Before I could respond, a shade crashed into Pandora. With a shriek, Pandora's jar flew from her hands and bounced across the ground, cracking and chipping but never breaking. Suddenly and in unison, every last spirit in the pit ceased their running and looked with eyeless stares towards the jar. A beat later, the sinners jumped towards the pot, breaking the silence with sudden screams of desperation. Like vultures feasting on carrion, the shades clawed each other in their struggle for the urn.

Once again Virgil's touch soothed me, and we clambered out of the pit, Pandora's frantic howls and the tumult of sinners receding behind us.