

## Holding on to Hope

### Characters:

- Divine: The embodiment of the divine and their power.
- Pandora: The first created woman, made as a plague.
- Pursuit: The embodiment of curiosity and the human spirit.
- Hope (Ensemble)
- Plague (Ensemble)
- Doubt (Ensemble)

**Preface from the Writer:** Holding on to Hope is about the humanity that faces all of us, the curiosity which has been thrust upon us and that we all must reckon with. This play is a tribute to those who sacrifice themselves in the name of this humanity, either through choice, like the great Marie Curie, or through circumstance, like the biblical Eve or, our protagonist, Pandora. (**A Note on Casting:** While all characters can be played by people of any background, both Hope and Pandora should ideally be played by performers of a gender minority.)

*DIVINE stands up centre. Slowly, they move in a formation of four pillars with ENSEMBLE, ENSEMBLE appearing only as they deliver their first line.*

DIVINE:

Oh men of earth, you've stolen fire,  
Built a hearth, and then climbed higher  
Drunk on power and desire,  
  
Let the fates and gods conspire-  
A test of sorts, to thwart this tort,   
This is our sport:

DIVINE and **ALL** (*Ensemble echoing like harsh winds*):

To **create** and **distort**.

ENSEMBLE, (*DOUBT revealing a box*):

A box

DOUBT, *snidely*:

Of evil you can't understand

ENSEMBLE, (*PLAGUE revealing a torch with flame*):

A cost

PLAGUE, *villainously*:

That punishes curious hands

ENSEMBLE, (*HOPE revealing a lump of clay as music immediately halts*):

A plot

HOPE, *innocently*:

To introduce women to man

*Ensemble gasps with an orchestral stab as lights blackout. Immediately, a spot flashes to PANDORA, centre stage.*

PANDORA:

I am woman herself,

Pandora, a gift from the ground

I am woman, Bold, and wise,

A spark of earth, a gift divine.

Mother of femininity,

Mother of those yet, to rise,

Father of those yet found,

Cunning and pure and *hungry*.

ENSEMBLE:

You witch!

PANDORA, *shouting back at ensemble helplessly*:

I am just trying to survive!  
A curse? A crime? My only sin—  
To live, to question, to begin?  
Zeus placed me on this world  
With a gleam in his eye  
Seeking retribution for the urge  
Of mere mortal men, Please *hear my cry!*

ENSEMBLE:

You terror!

PANDORA, *continuing*:

With gold and gifts I am adorned,  
From silk and light to suede velour,  
With gold and silk they draped me fine,  
A jewel upon a hollow shrine,  
But in the end, I'm truly poor,  
A plot-device-type false grandeur... (*a pause*)

I hope that I am made for more,  
Beyond the man-pig's paramour,  
A life worth living... Worth living for.

*Silence engulfs a mournful PANDORA as DIVINE enters. PURSUIT enters as well, hiding... watching... waiting.*

PANDORA, *harshly to DIVINE*:

What do you want?

ENSEMBLE, *hushed*:

A plot

DIVINE:

I want to see you, my child,  
Now I've found you in the wild,  
Why should you act all beguiled,  
To Divine, whom you've reviled?

PANDORA:

So *what*?

ENSEMBLE, *hushed*:

A plan

DIVINE:

You've got brains, and you've got guile,  
Courage crossing over miles,  
Yes, you deserve love and much more...  
A bonus made to set the score...

You seek a gift? Then, take my prize:  
A secret sealed from mortal eyes  
A treasure vast, yet held so tight  
A thing that must not see the light

ENSEMBLE, *hushed*:

A box

PANDORA:

A box?

DIVINE:

A box. But you must never open it.

PANDORA:

But-

DIVINE:

Never open, never peek,

Lest ruin come to strong and weak.

What sleeps inside is best unknown—

It swallows souls. It steals your own.

Never.

*Pandora is left alone with the box. PURSUIT surprises her.*

PURSUIT:

Hello, Pandora...

ENSEMBLE, *to audience*:

Pursuit, the voice of reason.

PANDORA:

Who are you?

PURSUIT:

I am all you desire and all that you prize,

A tune sung before, and once more reprised,

I am Pursuit, the tester of lies,

Lover of all that the gods should despise.

I am Pursuit, cunning as a fox,

And you could be too, and escape the stocks  
The cruel existence you endure,  
And chase the “love” which you long for...

PANDORA:

Tell me, how?

*Ensemble appears again. PURSUIT's joy builds as the dialogue continues, persuading Pandora.*

ENSEMBLE:

A box

PURSUIT:

That thing that you've got there,  
Most surely it has more than air,  
Its contents must be made for more,  
Or else, what are you waiting for?

PANDORA:

Yet Divine has warned me so...  
Could they not wish to let me know?  
What if within, my fate is spun?  
A destiny I might outrun?

ENSEMBLE:

A plot

PURSUIT:

But surely, it could be defied,  
To catch an apple of the eye?  
The treasure can't be of much harm,  
Why would gods, a threat, re-arm?

PANDORA:

I'm starving here, not food, but more,  
A thirst for knowledge lost before,  
And, after all, the gods abandon,  
Would it hurt to stick my hand in?

ENSEMBLE:

A plan

PANDORA:

Fine. *(a pause)* I'll open it.

*PURSUIT watches eagerly. PANDORA takes a deep breath, slowly beginning to open the box. Immediately, pandemonium begins when the lid flings open. PANDORA drops the box to her feat. ENSEMBLE, embodying the spirits of the box run across the stage. PURSUIT joins them. Each member of ENSEMBLE stops center to deliver their line.*

DOUBT:

I am Doubt, a whisper small,  
A creeping shadow, subtle, tall.  
I steal your trust, unravel fate,  
And make the strong hesitate.

PLAGUE:

I am Plague, destruction's art,  
A sickness set to shred apart.  
A breath, a touch, a poisoned tide—  
I take, I burn, I do not hide.

HOPE:

I am Hope, a golden spark,  
A lantern lit within the dark.  
Though winds may howl and storms may rise,

My light endures. It never dies.

PURSUIT:

And now, doubt, plague, hope,  
Away you fly, send yourselves unto the sky,  
For now you will become a trope,  
Pandora and men, say your goodbyes,

PANDORA:

No, don't leave me alone!  
This gift, this curse, from whence you've flown...  
Like you, to mere men I was thrown,  
And there, was made to make a home.  
  
And now, you've (*pointing to PURSUIT*) tempted me aside,  
You, you knew what was inside  
I thought you had pity for my cries,  
and all you sold to me were lies!

PURSUIT:

What I gave you were not lies, but truths.  
The truths about yourself you had not yet discovered.  
The truths about yourself you already knew deep down.  
The truth that you are human. Its this that I uncovered.  
  
Only you can know for yourself what you believe,  
Only you can hold on to what you hold dear,  
So now you know, you stand reprieved.

DIVINE, *finishing for PURSUIT*:

You can't believe all that you hear.



You must choose now, for yourself,  
As push now comes to shove,

ALL, *except PANDORA*:

What do you do?

ENSEMBLE:

A box

PANDORA:

Is this life? Was I just cursed to be a toy?  
No, that was what I was made for.  
But I can achieve more. I can soar higher than my design,  
I can break free from this box...

ENSEMBLE:

A plot

PANDORA:

And what is my last gift to humanity,  
A mother of femininity?  
Or harbourer of much more,  
To lose myself for others to soar.

I've released these spirits to wreck havoc.  
Doubt, Plague, and Hope.  
But hope, of all, we must save now.

What is our line of defense against doubt?  
To hope. To hope, that our lover is there behind us as we escape from Hades.  
To hope that we were made for more.

And how can we fight against plague,  
But without hope. To hope, that there is a future ahead of us.  
To hope that we will see the other side of the war.

Without hope, we are nothing.  
With hope, doubt and plague become nothing,  
For the light that shines upon humanity, and humanity alone in their hope,  
Overcomes the doubt and plague that riot with mortals and god.  
To hope is love. To hope is trust. To hope is to live.  
To live for more than a plot.

ENSEMBLE:

A plan

*PANDORA grabs HOPE's wrist, as all other characters leave the stage. HOPE looks back, smiling to PANDORA, indicating her willingness to stay.*

PANDORA:

And now, I'm holding on to hope.  
I'm holding on.

*PANDORA releases HOPE's hand. HOPE turns to face her. PANDORA extends a hand, implying a handshake, but HOPE instead willingly embraces her.*

END OF PLAY