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Anna Grace Bolland

Pandora's Box and Other Problems

United States

TAGS: Pandora





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Pandora's Box and Other Problems
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States
Original Language	English
First Edition Details	Anna Grace Bolland, *Pandora's Box and Other Problems.* Grace Bolland Ltd., 2012
ISBN	9781490383248
Genre	Detective and mystery fiction, Fables
Target Audience	Children (10–14)
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Creators



Anna Grace Bolland , b. 1999
(Author)

Anna Grace Bolland was 13 when she wrote and self-published this book, her first novel, *Pandora's Box and Other Problems.* Writing novels and stories was a part of her homeschooling program. Anna is a regular participant of National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) Young Writers Program – an annual online and offline event for young authors, consisting in taking a challenge of writing a novel during one month (traditionally it is November) (Program's website, Anna's participant pep talk for NaNoWriMo's Camp NaNo, given in July 2014, see here, accessed: October 8, 2018). Currently she is a college student intending to become a journalist, and writes short stories.

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Additional information

Summary

Pandora Birch, a teenage girl, lives in a small American town of Whitewater, Pennsylvania, with her father. Her parents are divorced, and she hasn't seen her mother for many years – in fact, she doesn't remember her. Pandora's father, a gifted and successful landscape designer, is rather unhappy in his private life, and his daughter is even more unhappy with all his girlfriends.

One day Pandora and her best friend Erica decide to explore a loft of Pandora's house. There they find an old Chinese puzzle box, which, as they soon find out, lacks a key to be opened. The box is inscribed with the maiden name of Pandora's mother, who was also called Pandora. In search for the key and the secret of the box, Pandora goes first to her mother's house and then to the abandoned house of her late grandmother. Pandora's mother, whom she didn't know before, appears to be a narcissistic and hysterical woman, who totally lacks any love and empathy for both Pandora and her step-sister, Avis, a rebellious teenager, severely traumatized by her stepmother's attitude. At first, Avis is rather hostile to her stepsister. Later, however, Pandora manages somehow to make friends with her and even to soften her heart by her kindness and empathy.

Pandora learns from Avis that her mother had a younger sister, who also had a name Pandora, who died in her childhood. In fact, "Pandora" was a traditional name for girls in the family. Pandora decided that her aunt Pandora was the last owner of the box and that she must have hidden its key. This suggestion leads Pandora and her friends to abandoned house of Pandora's grandmother where the girl used to live.

Finally, they manage to find the key there. When the box is opened, Pandora finds in it a pendant, representing a golden apple set in silver, and a letter. The letter is from Pandora's great-grandmother, who also bore the same name and whose name was engraved on the box. It explains, that the pendant is an inheritance from the mythological Pandora, who opened the first Pandora's box and so caused all the evils of humankind. In repentance and attempts to atone for her mistake, she created the pendant and had it bewitched so that the one who wears it has the power to find "a word spoken at the right time" (this is a direct reference to Proverbs 25:11: "Like golden apples in silver settings so is a word spoken at the right time")

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and to help people in trouble and distress with her kindness. So the pendant, as well as the name Pandora and the gift of the right word and of kindness, became the inherited treasure in Pandora's family.

Pandora Birch, therefore, is a direct descendant of the Pandora of the myth. She accepts the pendant and her calling. In fact, she realizes that she acted upon this calling even before finding the pendant, in her relationships with her stepsister.

A short bonus novella added to the novel, "The Real McCoy", shows how Pandora uses her newly gained gift. With her friends, she helped the curiosity shop owner, Roberta McCoy, to identify a shoplifter who regularly steals things from her shop, and to cope with the fact that this shoplifter is her boy-friend. Eventually Roberta finds her comfort in the marriage with Pandora's father and the greatest problem of the girl's life is solved: she has two happy and loving parents.

Analysis

This book was written by a teenage girl, about teenage girls and for teenage girls. It is full of the details, often unconnected to the main plot, but reflecting the main problems that worry girls of this age: first boyfriends, friendships and relationships with parents. The connection between episodes and the logic of the plot is not always clear: for instance, the episode of the loss of a suitcase in a bus seems isolated and has no connection with the main detective line. The guesses of the girls-"detectives" often seem arbitrary. This loose plot resembles a girl's diary. The writing style is rather unsophisticated and lacks literary perfection, though sounds with naïve sincerity.

In the second part, it stays unclear how the main function of the pendant – to find the right word and to comfort those in distress – is connected to the central task it performs here, namely to the identifying of a shop-lifter. The personal troubles of Pandora herself – namely her resentment against her friend Erica who attempted to play a role of a matchmaker in her relationships with their classmate Christopher – also seems alien to the main plot.

The central idea of the novel is closely connected to the developing sense of self and self-awareness of teenage girl. If the myth of Pandora reflects the negative side of femininity – in fact, it depicts a woman as a source of all evils of humankind – the novel is concentrated upon its positive side. The second box of Pandora, which

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the girl struggles to open and finally opens, is the antithesis of the first, the mythological one. The ability to find the word of comfort, the talent of empathy and the urge to help those in need and distress are facets of this positive side that Pandora Birch finds in herself and accepts as her calling.

The negative side of femininity is also represented in the novel, embodied in Pandora's narcissistic mother. Nevertheless, this image is rather over-simplified and isolated.

All in all, the book can be considered as an illustration of (self)-awareness of girlhood emerging in the modern society. The transformed image of the ancient Pandora with her willingness to help the humanity reflects the girl's understanding of positive sides of her womanhood. The detailed account of the girl's school life, her relationships with her friend Erica and her reflections on her parents' situation, for all their irrelevance to the main plot, can be significant in this perspective: they all are elements of the experience that is essential for formation of this positive side of womanhood, namely the ability to understand, empower and comfort others. This richness in details can even be seen as opposed to the old-fashioned view of the girlhood's experience as of something insignificant – in the same fashion as the new version of Pandora's myth is opposed to the traditional, "misogynic" version.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Pandora
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Adventure Character traits Communication Conflict Disobedience Divorce Family Friendship Gender Gender, female Humanism Initiation Names Parents (and children) Relationships School Siblings Small town life Step-parents Teenagers

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