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*For my very own Emily, who might even  
get around to reading it one day.*

*– BR*

*For Chris, who makes the Daylight realm magical.*

*– LT*

‘Until at length the full moon, lustre-fraught,  
Burst thro’ the gloom wherein she was enshrined;  
And then the willing, active, rapid thought  
Around the past, as round the future twined,  
At midnight hour.’

– JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE  
*‘At Midnight Hour’*



**I**t wasn't an obvious day for something terrible to happen, but maybe they never are. If they were obvious, people would just go, 'Oh, it's a Terrible Happenings type of day, better stay in bed', or something. That Saturday morning, when Emily came down fashionably late for breakfast, the only sign of terribleness was that her mum was making bacon sandwiches. This was highly suspicious though. It wasn't that her mum, Maeve, was a bad cook (although she absolutely was), but this was her dad's job. Had been for her whole life. Every Saturday, he'd be there dishing the bacon goodness out, after his shift at the Night Post. On this particular morning, however, he was slumped

at the table, pale as one of the ghosts he delivered to.

‘Dad, what is it? Are you okay?’

He looked up, and smiled a thin, watery smile.

‘I’m okay, Puzzle, it’s just that—’

‘It’s *just* that he’s been *fired* by the blasted eejits at the Night Post,’ her mum interrupted in her broad Irish accent, ‘and kicked him out of the Midnight Hour they have, and taken his blasted key too!’ She was yelling by the end, her face bright red.

The Midnight Hour was a whole other Victorian London, frozen in time when Big Ben first tolled midnight in 1859. It was now a sanctuary for all the remaining monsters and magic, but also a home from home for Emily and her whole deeply odd family.

‘It’s an outrage, that’s what it is!’ shouted Maeve. Emily’s magical Pooka mum whacked the bacon spatula on to the worktop to punctuate her words. ‘A piece of my mind I’d have given them, ye can be sure.’

She coughed suddenly as the smoke of burning bacon fat wafted from the grill. She was cursing at the cooker when a terrible noise erupted from under the table. It was the devil-baby (as Emily generally thought of her new brother), the latest, very unexpected arrival in the Featherhaugh household. Her dad, Alan, picked him up from his carrycot and rocked him. He normally quieted down because her dad had a very calming presence, but

today he just kept screaming, while Alan looked hunched and sad.

Emily was rigid with shock. Her quiet and capable dad was an unflappable, immovable part of her universe. To see him so lost was . . . a lot.

‘What do you mean, you’ve been fired?’

‘I’m out of the Night Post. Strictly no “daysies”, apparently.’

‘Daysie’ was a nasty word some of the Night Folk used for people from the Daylight world. He sagged back down into his chair, rubbing the back of the baby screaming in his arms.

‘Everything’s changing in there. They’re cutting all connections with the outside.’

‘Who’s “they”?’ demanded Emily.

‘Those toffee-nosed, grey-faced, dried-up, dusty, Dead eejits that think they run the world!’ shouted her mum from amidst a cloud of bacon smoke.

The Dead actually did kind of run the other world. However, after all her adventures in the Midnight Hour, Emily had friends in even higher places. She smacked her fist on the table.

‘Right, well, I’ll go straight in tonight and talk to the Library and get all this sorted out!’

‘Love, I don’t think you understand. You won’t be going in. None of us will be.’ Her dad sighed. ‘They haven’t just

fired me – they’ve sealed the doors between our worlds.’  
His face was bleak and drawn.

‘We’re locked out of the Midnight Hour for good.’



And that was it. They were out, like they’d never been in.

Emily had railed and ranted and roared, but it was done. It wasn’t like she hadn’t given it her best shot, either. As the midnight chimes of Big Ben whispered down the Thames, they’d tried her mum’s magic shadow key on the door of the local church. Nothing. They’d used her dad’s supply of magic stamps to write letters of complaint to powerful friends. Nothing. Even one of the precious express delivery stamps, which would usually vanish at the stroke of midnight by magical collection, was still sat there in the morning.

That had been the final straw for her dad. He’d taken to the sofa and hadn’t even glanced at his beloved compost heap since. He clumped around and had dinners with them and looked after the baby, but some essential spark seemed to have gone – he had, after all, done the world’s most dangerous job, and without it, he didn’t seem to know who he was supposed to be.

Emily knew how he felt. She yearned for the Hour. Usually, she was allowed to go in on school holidays and was due a half-term trip to visit Mammy Espeth, her mum’s

mum, clan chief of the Pooka and Emily's absolutely-must-never-be-called Nan. With Mammy's training, Emily had almost mastered her horse shape. Being half Pooka meant Emily was a shapeshifter and could do weird things with luck magic, but only inside the Midnight Hour, because there wasn't any magic left out here in the real world. In the Hour she was special, but out here she was just . . . Emily.

It was the worst of times, it was the . . . worst of times. It was like she'd been gifted something precious then had it snatched away from her. If she wasn't magic, what was she? It reminded her of the way that moody lion had kept kicking the kids out of Narnia. She'd always hated those bits. Them stuck outside, not knowing if they were ever going to be allowed back in, slowly starting to think they might have made it all up. She had imagined them stood at the back of a wardrobe, all hot and stuffy with horrid fur coats, but there being nothing there other than cobwebs and wooden boards. She used to worry every time she put the magic key in the Night Post door, that this would be the time it wouldn't turn and she'd be stuck outside for ever. Now her fears had come true.



Two weeks after the Bad News Breakfast, Emily was hiding upstairs in her bedroom. She'd had a near humdinger of a row with her mum and had retreated to prevent the

apocalypse. They had a track record of catastrophic blowouts, as they both possessed an unstoppable family mouth condition known as the gob. Emily knew her mum had a lot on her plate, what with the baby and now a sad dad at home all day, but she was miserable too and it was hard not to snap sometimes. Now, hours later, she lay slumped on top of her bed, and watched the circular sculpture of the three black glass hares she called the Abbitts chase their tails on her wall.

She sighed and fiddled with the necklace of old coins around her neck. They chinked and gleamed on their chain, all silver and gold and malice. Not just any old coins, but the Bad Pennies. They were the most ferociously cursed coins of all time, bearers of incredible ill-fortune, unless you were a luck-juggling Pooka like Emily, of course. Her mum (when in a better mood) had let her have them to cheer her up, but right now they were just another reminder of the magic she was missing. She lay back, clinking the coins, and tried to think happy Pooka thoughts. Darting through soft grass as a hare, or galloping across Midnight London in the stark light of the eternally full moon. It didn't help.

‘Hoggins, why is everything colossally—’ She stopped, frowning. ‘Oh.’

The Hog was her just-possibly-magical pocket hedgehog and adventure buddy. Or had been. It was hard to

remember that he wasn't there anymore. No comforting warmth in her pocket. No grumbling grunts demanding worms. After a worrying period of being even more lazy and greedy than usual, in which she'd thought he might be ill, he had slipped into the deep sleep of hibernation. He was now tucked up in a bundle of warm leaves in his cardboard hog-palace, and she was hog-less (and banned from playing any loud music in her room until spring). Could her life get any worse?

She winced as a sound almost at the peak of human hearing echoed through the wall and made her bookshelves vibrate – the devil-baby, wailing like a foghorn being mugged by a car alarm. Why couldn't *he* hibernate until spring? She'd been kinda looking forward to being a sister, but it had been a lot better in theory. She'd picked him up once, and he'd erupted at both ends. She wasn't doing that again. As far as she could see, the only good thing about him was that the top of his head was super soft and smelt quite nice. Everything else was a hard 'no'.

Sleep was clearly going to be impossible. It wasn't just the baby howling, but the nasty twisting sense that something was wrong and she couldn't fix it. She was also, she didn't want to admit to herself, waiting to hear the midnight chimes, like she did every night nowadays. With her window cracked open a little, you could make out the chimes of Big Ben drifting down the river. She wasn't sure

why she did it, as they just made her feel worse. Like scratching the scab off a cut so it couldn't heal. For a brief moment though, it made her feel connected to her other home, knowing it was midnight in both places.

She edged closer to the window, despite the cold draught seeping under the curtain. As she did, the first haunting sound of the quarter bells, coming just before the real bongs, drifted to her on the breeze. She sang along under her breath, reciting the Night Folk rhyme that her friend Tarkus had taught her.

*'All through this night, moon be my faith, and by its light, all shall be safe.'*

The first bong came as the hammers fell on the enormous main bell, the true Big Ben, and it rang out in its unmistakable deep metallic voice. She was surprised to feel herself suppressing a sob, even though she totally wasn't a crier. Then . . . things got weird. The second bong started normally, then became a dragged out crawl of distorted noise, like someone slowing down a recording. All other sound stopped too. London's constant night-time drone of traffic faded away to nothing.

The silence was broken by the high-pitched screech of bicycle brakes, followed by glass-shattering levels of frantic banging. Someone, or something, was hammering on Emily's bedroom window!