Cluck O’Clock and the Midnight That Came Early



Cluck O’Clock is named after clocks, so this year he’s staying up for midnight. The real one. Then Professor Hooten shows the twins a wall of clocks, and midnight starts turning up all evening long.



On the last morning of the year, the twins built a snowman. Then Cluck O’Clock came in and wound his brass pocket watch. Click, click, click.

“Tonight I’m staying up for midnight,” he said. “The real one.”

“You fell asleep on Christmas Eve,” said Coop-Accino.

“After the sleigh,” said Cluck. “That’s different.”



Hen-Berry folded two paper hats at the kitchen table. A gold one for Cluck. A green one for Coop.

“Midnight is very late for a chicken,” she said.

“Midnight is when the new year starts,” said Cluck. “I want to be there when it does.”

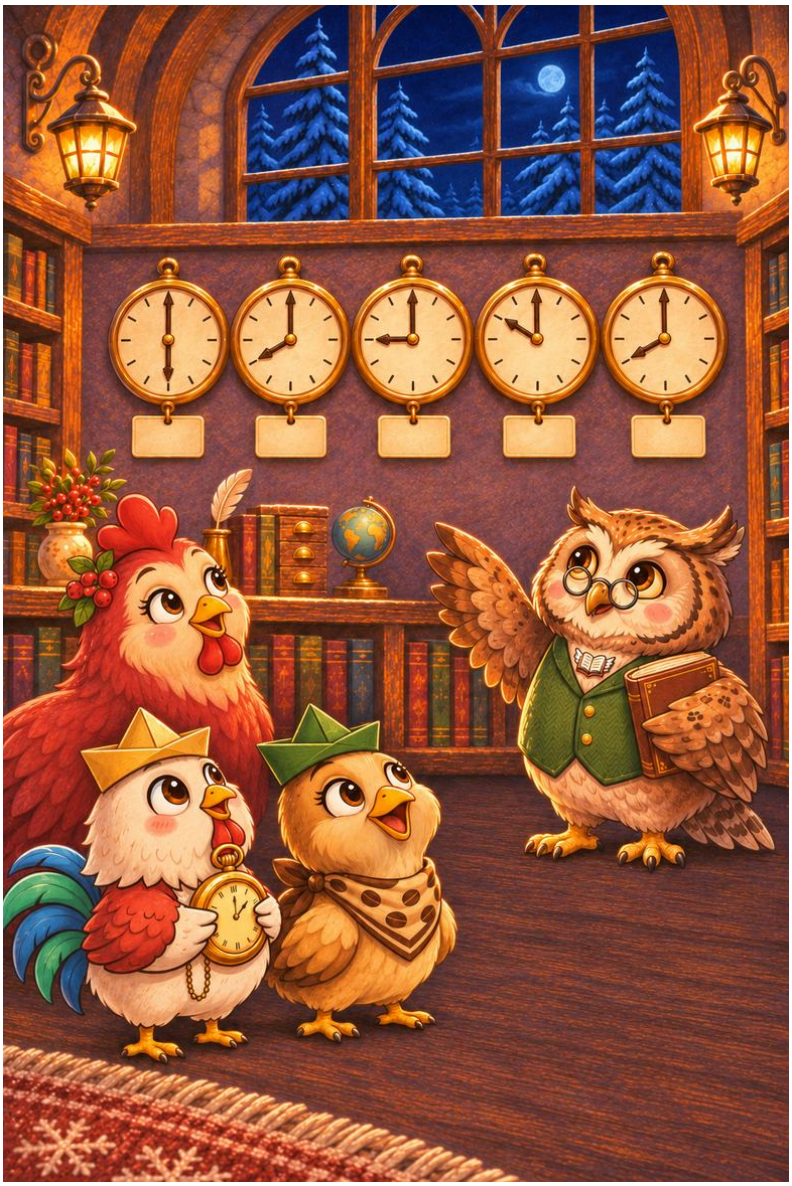


That evening, they walked to the library in their hats. Lanterns hung along the path, and the snow squeaked under their feet.

Professor Hooten’s party was for families. It started at six o’clock and finished at nine.

“Nine isn’t midnight,” said Cluck.

“No,” said Hen-Berry. “It isn’t.”



Inside, Hooten had hung five round clocks in a row on the wall. Each clock had a little card underneath.

“Every clock keeps the time somewhere else,” said Hooten. “Some places start their day before we do, so their midnight comes sooner.”



He tapped the first clock. Its card said **Here**. Its hands said six o’clock.

Then he tapped the last clock. Its card said **Kiritimati**. Its hands said eight o’clock in the morning.

“That island is far out in the Pacific Ocean,” said Hooten. “Its midnight came while you were building your snowman.”



Coop stared. “It’s next year already? Somewhere?”

Cluck held his watch up next to the **Here** clock. Both said six.

“So whose midnight comes next?” he asked.

Hooten pointed to a clock with a card that said **Dubai**. “In two hours.”



There was cocoa and a long table of little cakes. By the door stood a basket of old pot lids and wooden spoons.

“For the countdowns,” said Hen-Berry, and gave one of each to the twins.



“Here’s my plan,” said Cluck. “We count down every midnight, all the way round, until we get to ours.”

Coop counted the clocks on her wingtips. “That’s a lot of midnights.”

“That’s the good bit,” said Cluck.



At eight o’clock, the hands of the Dubai clock crept up towards twelve. Everybody gathered under the wall.

“Ten, nine, eight…” counted Hooten.

“Not yet,” whispered Cluck, watching his watch. “Not yet…”



“…three, two, one…”

“NOW!”

Clang went the pot lids. Bang went the spoons. “Happy New Year, Dubai!” everyone shouted.

Cluck’s gold hat slid down over one eye. He didn’t mind at all.



Cluck ate one more cake, then half of another. Then he yawned. He hid the yawn behind his hat.

Coop saw. She didn’t say anything. She just moved the cake plate a little closer to him.



At nine o’clock, it was midnight in Nairobi. Everyone counted again.

“…three, two, one…”

“NOW!” shouted Coop.

“Now,” said Cluck, a moment later. He had been blinking at the wrong moment.



“Home time,” said Hen-Berry.

“But Cairo is next!” said Cluck. “It’s on the wall!”

Hooten bent down. “You have a clock of your own,” he said, nodding at the watch. “When it says ten o’clock, it will be midnight in Cairo.”



Hen-Berry pulled the twins’ little sled home along the lantern path. Coop walked beside it. Cluck rode, holding his watch up to the moon so he could see the hands.

“Nine twenty,” he reported. “Still awake.”



In bed, the twins kept their hats on. Cluck held the watch in his wing.

“Two minutes to Cairo,” he whispered.

“Wake me for it,” said Coop, and closed her eyes.



Tick. Tick. Tick. The watch sounded much louder in the dark.

Nine fifty-nine. Cluck’s eyes closed. They opened again. They closed again, a little longer.



The long hand reached twelve.

“Ten,” whispered Cluck. “Nine… eight… seven…”

Each number was slower than the one before.

“Four… three…”

Then nothing.



Coop opened one eye. Cluck was fast asleep, with the watch still in his wing.

“Two,” she whispered. “One. Now.”

She waved her wingtip like a very small flag. “Happy New Year, Cairo.”



Coop slipped the watch out of Cluck’s wing. She laid it on the table between their beds and tucked the chain under it so it couldn’t clink.

Then she lay down, too.



Much later, something went pop, far away. Then fizz.

Coop woke up. Over the trees, a little flower of gold light opened in the sky. Then a red one.

It was midnight here. The real one.



“Cluck,” whispered Coop. “Cluck! It’s ours!”

Cluck turned over. “Not yet,” he mumbled. “Not yet…”

And he went on sleeping.



His gold hat had fallen on the floor. Coop picked it up and set it gently back on his head.

“Now,” she whispered.

She watched the last spark fade over the trees, and went back to sleep.



In the morning, Cluck woke up with his hat on. It was crumpled on one side.

“Did I miss it?” he asked. “Did I miss our midnight?”

“You were there,” said Coop. “Hat and everything.”



Cluck picked up his watch. Seven o’clock on the first morning of the year.

“Then I’m awake for the very first morning,” he said. “All of it.”

He climbed to the window.

“Not yet,” he said. “Not yet…”

“NOW!” said Coop. And Cluck pulled back the curtain on a whole new year of snow.