

Doctor Who: The Eighth Day

A work of fan fiction

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A simple box sat in the TARDIS.

Outside, it was lacquered wood.

Within, it was endlessly vast, as dark as the lusts in a good man's heart and as bleak as a broken promise.

The day had been quite pleasant until the Doctor's companion opened the box.

Twelve hours earlier, the TARDIS materialized on a barren world which held only one object of interest, a small wooden box with intricately carved designs upon its surfaces. A yellow sticky on top of the box warned, 'DO NOT OPEN. SERIOUSLY. JUST DON'T.'

'Bric-à-brac?' asked Charley Pollard, as the Doctor laid the box on the desk.

He sat in his armchair, jacket soaked. Charley could see his hair curling in concentration.

In silence, the Doctor studied the driftwood. What could it be? Jetsam?



The Doctor closed his eyes, concentrating. His thoughts teetered delicately at the edge of the box, the edge of knowing. He could sense something. A dark, whispering massing.

Charley felt it too; a single word flaking away from the artefact.

'Pandora...'

'Doctor, why is that name so familiar?'



'The name stems from a myth about a box.' He flashed a smile at her. 'It might even be the same one. Shall we find out?'

Before she could answer the Doctor prized the heavy lid open.

And the cloister bells rang in terror.

Out came Boredom and Lost Keys. Out slithered Late Buses, as Charley held down Thursday Afternoons. 'Doctor—butterfly nets! I'll get the TARDIS bins.'

'So *that's* where I left the Minor Inconveniences. But... one's missing.'

'Big inconvenience?'

'An ex. Of sorts.'

Charley raised an amused eyebrow. 'Oh really?'

'An incredibly persistent one. She liked midnight dances. And killing things. So I popped her in here to have a good, long think about her life choices.'

'And how long ago was that?'

'Good question. Wish I knew.'

He recalled the Ex and their 13 passionate, paradoxical weeks in July of 1693-he forgot about the Web of time in her presence-as a guest of Bashō and the farewell poem the monk had written them:

Son of Gallifrey.
Summer leaves us. So should you.
Send me a postcard?

Snapping out of his reverie and shutting the lid, the Doctor said, 'Yes, good question. But right now, not the most important question.'

'Oh? Do tell.'

'The most important questions are, Where is she? How did this box end up on this planet? And what is she up to?'

'I can't trust her to behave. She once invented the Eighth Day of the Week on a whim, purely so we could have...personal time.'

Charley crossed her arms, harrumphing. 'So where are *we* going to find her?'

The Doctor smiled. 'The Eighth Day of the Week.'

And he set the controls.

The Eighth Day is the black sheep of Time, now alone in an eddy eviler than Monday. It tried to bully its way between Thursday and Friday. Time did not approve, already considering Thursday a mistake.

Somewhen uniting work-weariness and weekend hunger, the TARDIS materialised.

Charley rushed to the scanner. She observed the crimson hue drenched across the land and the large crumbling tower blocks on the horizon.

'The Eighth Day seemed abandoned. Perhaps the Doctor's Ex felt the same,' she thought. 'I'd hate for that to happen to me...'

Halfway to the towers, Charley stopped. 'You realise you never said? Who is she?'

'Patience.'

'It's *exhausting*, always waiting for answers. Look...'

'No. Patience. The idea of! The only one I—'

'Doctor, *look!*'

They'd stopped. But the towers were getting closer.

'I do worry when physical reality goes a bit mushy,' said the Doctor.

'Mushy?'

'Yes. The land between us and those towers seems to be shrinking. Do you feel shorter?'

'No.'

'You do look about the right size.'

'Look, before you go too Alice in Wonderland...'

Perspective is dangerous in a universe this big but a dash works wonders. At the mention of Alice, the Doctor reconfigured his.

Only the Rutans have a word for the mix of delight and dread he felt as the towers rose into the sky and formed the Ex's Cheshire grin.

'Doctor,' said Charlie. 'Should we be worried? Doctor?'

The Doctor had vanished. In his place was a table, and upon the table, a key. The TARDIS was nowhere to be seen. Where it stood lay a white cat, grooming itself. Ahead, the grin widened and loomed ever larger.

Charley suspected this was the only means of finding the Doctor. So she took the key, the cat's glassy eyes following her.

In the ground beneath her feet was a door. Charley put the key into the lock. The door cracked open.

And she fell.

Charley fell into the week before next, and yesterday's day after tomorrow. Signs drifted past, pointing to the morning and afternoon and evening and night.

She felt a strange juddering.

Charley opened her eyes to see she was stood on the hands of a giant clock.

Whilst the clock had no hands the sound remained. The tick-tocking. The metallic ground vibrated under her.

Charley shivered in the cold. Her eyes darted to the numbers, but they revealed nothing to her.

Apart from number eight. That's where *they* stood smiling.

In their clock face observation deck, scientists scurried. So soon, after Pandora?

'Yar, a breach in the Surrealist Zone! Who be she?'

'I reckon that there Doctor can say,' said a cowgirl in a lab coat, 'once... the Metaphor Lord arrives with him.'

Smiles crumbled.

'Stop this nonsense at once,' snapped a lady wearing a rather dashing crown. She strode into the obs deck, glared around.

'But that's our job,' wailed a scientist.

'You're fired. All of you. Except you. Find the Doctor. And give that girl a trampoline to land on.'

Gloop! went the clock face as it melted away like the persistence of memory.

Ayie! went Charlie as she slipped through where it had been.

Sproing! went the trampoline as it bounced her playfully into next week.

‘Are you quite finished with your nonsense?’ Charley said to the crown-laden woman.

The woman flashed Charley a disturbingly familiar grin.

‘What do you want?’ said Charley.

‘You, of course. The competition.’

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘I need your help.’

‘You’re the Ex,’ said Charley. ‘But why do they call you...?’

The kiss answered her question. It was warm, drugging, but pleasant, Charley thought, as Persuasion held her in her embrace.

‘Miss Pollard. Will you help me stop the Quartzopus?’

‘... hic. Sorry?’

‘The Quartzopus.’ said Perseverance. ‘It’s what’s causing all this nonsense.’

‘I don’t follow.’

‘None of this is logical. The Quartzopus has damaged the Continuity Engine. This device.’ Persistence gestured to the giant clock. ‘The week doesn’t have 8 days...’

‘But I’m just me, what can I do?’ Charley asked.

The stranger didn’t look her in the eye.

‘That’s the thing about the Quartzopus. It’s a creature of impossibility, an anomaly in time and creation. Just like you, Charley. We need you to gain its trust...’

The world folded up around her, like the walls and people had creased in shame, leaving just a small box, and an even smaller Charley inside.

'It's all very simple.' She wheeled—on the Doctor. 'It eats days. It's so hungry, it made extra. And then... it ate mine.'

'I'm so sorry,' said the Doctor not sounding sorry at all.

'So I'm going to give it some really miserable days, the ones that make you cry and crawl back under the duvet.'

'Hey! I'll have you know most of my days are very pleasant!'

'You obviously weren't paying much attention.'

And to this end, they baked it a pie of all the times that never were. A pie seasoned with Pleasant Valley Tuesdays and mild Smarch nights and topped with out of date dates.

'Beware the Ides of October,' the Doctor intoned.

The Doctor added the final touch, a dash of Thursday Next. Charley asked, 'But how do we find the Quartzopus?'

'We don't have to, Charley. She'll find us.' With a nod of his head, Charley looked behind her. There was the white cat, its eyes sparkling like... Quartz.

'The cat and the Quartzopus are a gestalt entity,' the Doctor said. 'If it escapes the Eighth Day, that's the end!'

The Quartzopus reared its bulbous cranium and dug its diamond-studded tendrils into every day, splintering reality at its touch.

'We're too late!' cried Charley.

'Don't know the meaning of it,' scoffed the Doctor, and held the pie aloft. 'Here, kitty kitty kitty...'

The Quartzopus, chomping its way through Now, looked down at the Doctor, the sweetened scent of impossible days filling its 27 nostrils.

Its noses twitched.

But Charley knew what to do. She crept forward as the creature ate.

It's like what the Ex had said. The Doctor may be an event, but Charley was something else, something more.

Her soft fingers splayed against its fur and the touch was welcomed with a deep purr.

Once, in a game of Sardines, Charley's family forgot to find her, so she stayed hidden, for hours and hours and

Once, lost in the TARDIS, she dreamt of fleeing deeper in, for days and days and

Once, she offered a hungry god her years. Her past. Herself.

Today, Charley offered scratches.

The cat rumbled with joy, bumped its forehead against Charley's before inveigling itself into her arms.

'Charley, you do know what you're holding there, yes?' said the Doctor.

'An absolutely splendid cat! And so fluffy!'

Every cat is a paradox. Their beauty springs from the sublime tension in which they hold passion and indifference, rancor and languor.

Even the most mundane cat is as alien and unknowable as Charley herself.

This was not a cat.

But it fed on what she offered.

Satisfied, the cat licked its paws and, with a wink and a wide grin, brandished its claws, slightly fracturing reality so that, after Charlie blinked, she and the Doctor were standing in front of the clock, the Continuity Engine, and the Ex was beside them.

'Charlie Pollarde,' said Patience, 'you have saved time.'

'Thank you,' beamed Charley. 'But... why is my name spelt like that?'

'Resonance of the Continuity Engine repairing itself,' the Professor explained. 'I can't explain properly with only 12 characters le

'Twelve letters... Twelve numbers of the clock.' The Doctor muttered, a little impressed. 'Both space and time are slipping back into their natural rhythm.'

The Continuity Engine gave a mighty heave, and the hands of the clock were in motion once more.

This universe was well again. Time had found its rhythm.

The pair stood together triumphant. He tugged on Charley's hand. 'Well, I think we've done enough for today. Time to go!'

'But Doctor, what about her?' Charley gestured with a sad look. 'Don't leave without a goodbye...'

'She's *Patience*. And the last time I stopped to smell the roses—well, Vervoid prison stinks.' He swept the cosmic cat hair from his coat. 'Our small talk's microscopic.'

'Fine. Don't say goodbye. Say... hello.' Charley nudged open the TARDIS, and Patience followed.

'I like your box better than mine.'

'You can't have it,' said the Doctor, glaring.

'*I'm* not a thief. I don't steal boxes and I don't steal time.'

'Where would you like to go?' asks Charley as cheerily as she can.

'Home.'

'Oh no,' said the Doctor.

Patience smiled. 'Oh yes.'