

Clocked

by Helen Cooney

Carla Rivers blotted her glossy lips, slipped on her black pumps, and grabbed her purse. She locked her 27th floor apartment door behind her and rushed to the elevator door, catching it just in time.

Carla was a sensible, ambitious, attractive woman who usually let nothing upset her. But this morning her throat was dry, her hands were clammy, and her stomach seemed twisted inside. Needless to say, it was a big day for her—she had an appointment with her boss.

For many years Carla had worked at the magazine *Chloe* and had dreamed of one day becoming the editor. The job was now available, and she was a shoe-in for the promotion. At least she hoped so.

Out on the bustling streets, she flagged down a taxi and said breathlessly, “86th and Lex. I’m going on the Lexington Line.”

“You sure? I could drive you all the way in... The power has been a little sketchy on that subway,” said the taxi driver.

“I’m sure,” she said.

After paying the man, she hurried to catch the train. She made it just in time, and took a seat in between an old man and a young lady and her child. Carla let out a deep breath and tried to relax—she would surely make it on time now.

At 9:50 AM she had scheduled a meeting with the editor—the retiring editor who was looking to give a promotion to a worthy writer such as herself. She checked her watch: 9:03. Yes, there should be time enough to spare.

The train jolted, the lights flickered and then they went out. Carla steadied herself and put a hand over her pumping heart. This couldn’t be happening—today of all days! Well, she had at least ten minutes to spare before it would be a tight squeeze to make her appointment.

Two minutes went by, then three, then four. The car she was in became stuffy and hot. The people fidgeted anxiously and shifted in their seats.

Five minutes gone. The repair work must have begun by now. It wouldn’t be much longer—it couldn’t be.

Six minutes, seven. A nervous sweat appeared across her brow. She wiped it impatiently away. What was taking so long? Usually they had these trains up and running within seconds.

Eight minutes. She couldn’t afford to lose any more time. Her appointment was in 39 minutes, and she needed every one of them to get through the bumper-to-bumper traffic only Manhattan could furnish.

Then, as suddenly as everything had stopped, it started again. The lights faltered a few times, then shone strong, and the subway car started to move again. Maybe she would make it on time.

Carla burst from the doors of the train and flew up the stairs to the street. Ahh, downtown.

A cab pulled over and she climbed in. Moments later she was pressing the buttons impetuously on her office building’s elevator to the 5th floor.

When the elevator dinged and the metal doors parted, she smoothed down her hair, licked her lips, and walked gracefully into her boss’s office.

“Mrs. Summers? We have an appointment?” Carla glanced at her watch: 9:57. “Sorry I was late,” she added.

“Oh yes, just the girl I wanted to see. Please take a seat,” Mrs. Summers said, motioning toward a plush green chair in front of her desk. “I have some wonderful news for you.”

Carla took a seat and let out a deep sigh of relief, knowing that for her morning of stress she was about to be rewarded.

