Within each moment, there is a stretch of time and space beyond that which is known to man. Each second containing worlds as vast as space and as timeless as infinity. Moments that act as the middle ground between light and shadow, between the known and the unknown, and they lie between the pit of man's fears and the heights of his understanding. These fractions of moments, these captured fragments of time, are what encompasses the larger body of the Midnight Hour.

Street scene. Summer of two years prior. A busy corner in a busy world populated by busy people.

The life of Carla Reigns has been one that has been defined by a connection to others. Distant daughter, perpetually absent friend, and a hopelessly beleaguered secretary with a series of unrequited would-be romances with the men in her office building. Never one for striking out on her own, Carla has spent her entire life catering to the pressure of her peers while still managing to impress none of them.

A woman shackled by the perceptions of others, about to find herself free of such mundane problems. Albeit, in exchange for a much different set of struggles.

Tonight, it is not only the grains in the hourglass that slip away but also existence as we, and Carla, know it to be… in the Midnight Hour.

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When she sat down and thought about it, she could occasionally still remember what she used to do before… well, before.

Wake up every day at seven ‘o’ clock to take a shower, get dressed, and take the train downtown so that she could get to her office building within some measure of punctuality. Sit down at her desk, file papers and arrange meetings, a small lunch at one before getting off at five and coming back to her apartment (alone). On Fridays, she’d call her mother and have the same conversation that she had every week about why she didn’t have a husband and why there weren’t any grandchildren coming and how her life was *not* as humdrum as her mother accused it of being week after week after week.

Believe it or not, her life still managed to be mostly contained to the workplace whose schedules and employees had kept her tethered down—albeit in a strange new way.

“Now Mr. Harrison I think that you’ll agree that the deal we’ve given you is quite generous.”

“Yes Mr. Harrison, I agree with Dapper Dan here; you should really be more grateful that they’re giving you your last two weeks of pay instead of the whole month’s.”

“Mr. Carter—Mr. Carter *please* I need you to understand that I simply can’t retire!”

“Yes Mr. Carter, what about poor old Georgie? His geriatric hands are simply too worn out to do anything *but* type type type away at his typewriter all day at the behest of some cold, unfeeling ogre. You simply *must* have a dictation expert on staff now that your *lovely* secretary has gone and let herself go.”

With an affectionate pat of her stomach as it bulged out from underneath her blouse, Carla reclined on the chaise lounge that her former boss kept in his office. She had learned that actually sitting between the two of them would be fun for a gaffe—anyone on the other side of her trying to figure out where the other person had gone—but it was far more fun for her to just lounge on the sofa and nibble away at the chocolates that Mr. Carter kept for a neglected wife that was growing thinner back home without the ritualistic sorts of bribery that came from a surprisingly henpecked husband (she’d followed him home at least once to figure out what the deal was). All the while his equally neglected former secretary grew that much fatter; though it wasn’t like anyone would be able to tell the difference.

“Oh what*ever* shall I do if I’m not able to have someone’s nimble fingers typing away at my inane dictation, ensuring that my each and every word is enshrined in ink for all eternity and all those to see?” she spoke as Mr. Carter for a brief moment as she rolled her eyes and popped another bonbon into her mouth, “Puh-lease. Just pay the man what you know he’s worth. He’s certainly a much better secretary than I ever was.”

Rising to a seated position with a posh “oof”, Carla wrestled with the meat of her stomach as it fought for her to stay pinned down. It was getting harder for her to sit herself up with grabbing onto the arm rest now and again—the bulging swell of her belly as it bulged out over the tight waistband of her a-line skirt proof positive of just how paradoxically easy her life had become in exchange for the crushing loneliness of being the only person on Earth who acknowledged her own existence.

“Mr. Carter?” Mr. Harrison asked again, more emphatically than before as his boss’s attention was diverted to the subtle creaking of the old day bed, “Mr. Carter are you even *listening* to me?”

“What? Oh, yes.” The older man furrowed his black brow as his eyes tore away from the corner of his office, “Just… thinking of some things that could stand to be repaired around here. Something that we’ll be able to afford to do now once your salary is being put to much better purposes—now, get out of my office.”

And with that, the meeting between the two old duffers came to a close, with the one storming out of the office while the other reclined back in his chair, reached underneath the secret compartment just to the left of the drawer, and pulled out a small flask.

A small, empty flask.

“What in the devil is going on in my office?” he asked himself aloud, unscrewing the cap and looking inside, “This is the third flask this month!”

“Whoopsie.” Carla shrugged her heavy shoulders and outstretched her hands cutely, “I suppose you’ll just have to get another bottle of that very expensive liqueur that you have imported from France—since the decanter of the stuff you keep at home is empty.”

As though the two events were scripted, Carla placed a hand over her mouth as if in laughter while Mr. Carter hung his head between his hands and groaned.

“Now really, Mr. Carter, you should have seen this coming.”

Carla rose from her seat and threw herself over the back of her former boss’s chair, belly blubber eeking scrumptiously over the leather back as she loomed tauntingly over Mr. Carter’s shoulders.

“You can’t keep a woman like *me* in such fine luxury while operating on the cheap. Between your wife and I, I dare say that we’ll have to start tightening *your* belt before we get anywhere close to tightening mine.”

“Well… I’m done hanging around here like an old house cat—maybe I’ll scrounge something up for lunch.”

Pushing off of his seat, Carla toddled towards the exit of the corner office, pudgy pillows of cheeks bouncing ambitiously behind her as they fought for space in her skirt.

“Ta-ta for now, boss.”

It felt strange to think that, as she entered the busy floor of her old workplace, that she had ever been able to interact—truly interact—with any of the people hurrying and scurrying about. It was almost stranger still for her to remember that her life used to be like theirs. Busy, busy, busy; working hard at a thankless job where she melted into the sea of faces in the typing pool that she belonged to. Even after her promotion to secretary, nobody seemed to notice her. And honestly, if she wasn’t going to get noticed at a lone desk, well, what was the point of even trying?

As for her current predicament, sure there were drawbacks. The existential dread notwithstanding, it could be tiring for her to try and find a new hotel room to sleep in every night. Procuring food was (clearly) not an issue, but the last time that she’d sat down at an actual restaurant was becoming a fleeting memory. And the lack of any conversation in her life (meaningful or not) had driven Carla just a bit mad. But far and away, she had learned to adapt to the situation better than most people could have.

“Oh, well, if it isn’t Mrs. Gleason—I see *you’re* settling into married life well, with those child bearing lovehandles.”

“If it isn’t Cathy! Oh goodness, you are *not* looking any younger these days, are you? I’d give you my secrets, but they’re patent pending. Sorry hon.”

“Easy there Summer, you don’t want to wind up like Mrs. Great Big Gleason over there do you? I think that’s quite enough for you… in fact…”

Plucking the pastry off the top, Carla happy chuckled to herself as she took a sinful bite for herself, leaving the typist looking around for a pastry that she could have worn was there just one moment ago…

As the surplus secretary wriggled her fingers greedily, happily taking what she could from the desks of those that were still fortunate enough to be acknowledged by the world, Carla slowly made her way to the elevator. The ability to still interact with the physical world had been her first clue that she wasn’t dead and that she wasn’t a ghost, and it had been grateful. But now that she had grown quite used to doing as she pleased and not dealing with the social fallout, it was easily one of the things that she was most thankful for.

“Aha—there we go boys. Hope there’s enough room for a gal with a little meat on her hips.” She squeezed into the elevator with four or five men in suits who could only silently remark about how claustrophobic the elevator suddenly felt, “Oho, I see someone else is going to the floor above the lunch room, I suppose nobody would mind if I just…”

Much to the confusion of the men in the elevator, Floor 12 lit up seemingly by itself just as the machine began to hum to life. Carla bounced from her heel to her toes, vast body quaking and creaking as it fit snug and tight in just one of the many adorable ensembles that had been so thoughtfully donated by the Plus Size department.

“You know, Jeremy.” Carla leaned in to flick the tie of one particularly attractive man, “I think that you look absolutely darling in that humdrum suit—what do you say we see how you look out of it?”

Absolutely no response. She had stopped bracing herself on the odd chance that someone would finally acknowledge her existence. No one ever did. But sometimes she found herself wishing that they would. Even if getting to let herself go like this was a fun experience, it really didn’t substitute actual human interaction. With people that she knew, or friends that she’d once had…

As it was, she was just one profoundly lonely woman, playing the Gadfly for her coworkers and her mother and her friends and the occasional classmate, buzzing around in their ears without so much as a swat in acknowledgement.

And sometimes, just sometimes, it left her feeling as empty as she had in the first few months of her sudden detachment from society.

The elevator ding ripped her away from her morose monologuing.

“Well—I see that you’re all very busy, and I’ve got a girlish figure to keep up.” She smiled wickedly, chipper demeanor returning to her ignored countenance, “But before I go get something yummy for my tummy, I think that you’ll all be taking something of a side-trip…”

Running her hands down the panel of elevator buttons, lighting up the lot of them, the men in the elevator looked aghast at the sudden glow as they began to descend one floor at a time.

“Well… that was fun.” She smiled to herself, “Now, onto lunch…”