

# Watching the Clock

*by Elizabeth Kate Switaj*

Benjamin did everything by the clock. He ate when the little hand pointed to five and the big hand pointed to six. He danced when the little hand pointed to three and the big hand pointed to seven. He slept when they both hit twelve.

To be more precise, he did everything according to his copper pocketwatch. It was hand-wound, and it ticked too slow as it ran down, and it ticked too fast when he wound it back up. Benjamin never tried to set it aright.

His friends called him spontaneous. He'd consult his watch in the middle of a movie and stand up, asking if they wanted tacos. He'd sleep on the beach, on a bus stop bench, in a French restaurant with his head in his plate. His relationships never lasted long. Neither did his jobs. Fortunately, Benjamin was a good enough writer to make a living beginning an article every time the big hand passed four.

One day, his watch stopped and wouldn't wind. Benjamin thought about getting it repaired but knew it wouldn't be the same. What had he lived for all these years?

He packed a can of kerosene in his rucksack and made his way to Westlake Station, where he watched the giant terracotta clock.

—When the big hand passes eight, I'll douse myself and burn.

Then he realized he'd forgotten his lighter.

For the first time, Benjamin was lost.

