

# Watch

by Michael D. Brown

In front of him a table full of women, and the large one with her back to him, wearing a lightweight white business jacket stretched so taut across her frame was bulging out in ripples, but he never saw her face. However, the one in red was smiling, and more than once he caught her smiling in his direction. Still, he was unprepared when, on a return from the restroom, she stopped at his table to ask him, "Are you alone?"

Before he could protest he really hated being reminded of the time, she snapped the metal band of a watch around his wrist. "You've got twelve free hours," she said.

"What comes with that?" he asked.

"The best sex you've ever had," she said, "And the last."

Intrigued by her offer and her veiled threat, he gaped at her ample cleavage, and she did not appear to be offended.

Well, he took her to his place, as might be expected, and there was no sign of protest at anything he suggested.

At that point he could not recall whether she had alerted her friends she was leaving, and none of their profiles, for that was all he had seen of any of the others, registered.

She came out of his bathroom in a black teddy, and afterwards it was good sex. He came three times then fell asleep exhausted.

At six a.m. he was awakened by the alarm on the watch, and found he could not remove it from his wrist, though he was able to turn it off. Of course, she was gone, but had left a little patchouli-scented note on a pillow.

*You have six hours left, it read, use them well.*

He smiled and started dozing off again, but when the aching in his gut became unbearable, he rose. On his way to the kitchen for some aspirin, he pulled at the timepiece, which now ticked audibly like a stopwatch, and found again that he could not remove it.

Why me, he wondered.

He wasted the morning over coffee and cigarettes, and by ten-thirty the sense of impending doom overwhelmed him. He rarely, if ever, had suffered claustrophobia, but that was what he felt now

He drove back to the bar, but it was closed, so he parked across the street and waited, for what he could not say.

At eleven-thirty-five when the pain had him doubled over his steering wheel and he could not move without a wrenching, he pissed in his pants, and still he wondered what he had done to deserve such a fate.

As the clock on the church steeple chimed noon, he closed his eyes and waited to enter oblivion. Anything would be better than the pain he felt by then.

