

# timeout



a short story by  
**e. g. fabricant**

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*Timeout* is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

*Author's Note:*

*Timeout* was my entry in National Public Radio's Round 11 of their occasional feature, "Three Minute Fiction," in which they invited listeners to submit an original, unpublished story of 600 or fewer words which is "not inappropriate" and fulfills a condition set by that Round's author-judge. Here, a character had to find something he or she has no intention of returning. I wanted to cast the state of our growing economic inequality in more intimate terms

# TIMEOUT



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He jammed his key into the deadbolt cylinder and hesitated. “Hector!” he said, over his shoulder.

“Yes, sir?”

“Get that damned thing washed before tomorrow—I can’t afford to be picked up dirty!”

“Yes, sir.”

He let himself in and dropped his briefcase on the terrazzo. “Maria!”

She appeared, drying her hands. “Yes, Mr. Chase?”

“What time’s dinner?”

“Seven-thirty, as usual.”

He glanced at his wrist and rolled his eyes. “Oh, for—.”  
He glared at the plastic Casio.

Maria grimaced. “Still no luck locating your watch, sir?”

“No.” He dragged his fingers through his hair. “I checked with the cops again today. Still nothing. What’s it been—a month? A law-abiding citizen can’t even wash his hands in this city without getting ripped off. God knows why I pay all those

taxes, anyway—but you people wouldn’t know about that, would you?”

Maria was stoic. “But—your household insurance will cover it, yes?”

“Oh, sure—after I cough up \$1K for the deductible and run in place for another 30 days.”

“I’ll fetch your martini, sir,” Marie said, retreating.

“You read my mind. Where’s the mail?”

“On the tray, sir.”

He riffled through the usual No. 10 crap and stopped. Huh. Plain envelope—kinda dirty. Handwritten address; no return. ‘Forever’ stamp. He held it up to the light. One page; no ‘extras.’ He flipped it over and ripped into it with the letter opener. He shook out the sheet, smoothed in out on the hall console, and fished for his reading glasses. Double-spaced, Inkjet on standard copy paper. No date.

*Dear Mr. Chase:*

*Found your watch while cleaning the Men’s Room. Rolex Daytona Cosmograph, 18 Karat yellow gold, Oyster bracelet—\$34,650.00 retail, according to my new associates. I know how inconvenient it must be for someone like you to go without a quality timepiece to keep close track of important developments in your life.*

*Allow me to break down a few of mine for you:*

*(1) Hours since you closed the Springfield branch and laid us all off—me, after seven years of wearing that stupid polo shirt: 30,668.*

*(2) Hours since I discovered what a joke that ‘outplacement’ program you offered us was: 24,528.*

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(3) *Hours since you foreclosed on us, because that H.A.M.P. consultant you hired was beyond worthless: 17,522.*

(4) *Hours what few possessions we have left have been in and out of storage: 16,923.*

(5) *Hours since we wore out our welcome with family and friends and had to check ourselves into a shelter: 6,573.*

(6) *Hours since my unemployment ran out: 5,694.*

(7) *Hours I've worked two minimum-wage, part-time jobs, because I have a B.A. and no 'certified skills:' 5,256.*

(8) *Hours my three kids have lost in school due to our situation: 1,080.*

(9) *Hours my wife has spent in the hospital, due to 'nervous exhaustion:' 240.*

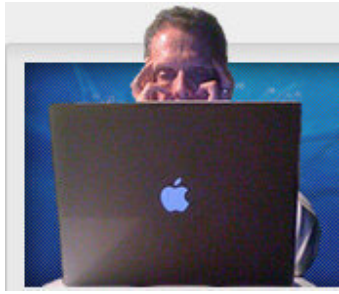
*I'd say you should do a better job of keeping track of your personal possessions but, under the circumstances, that would be hypocritical. Hope you're well; best to the family.*

*Sincerely yours,*

*'John'*

*P. S. They say it's best to 'forgive and forget.' Well, I forgive you—but you can forget about the watch.*





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