

# The Anonymous Life of Patek Philippe

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For Joshua Simon, Israeli curator, writer and editor. Without Joshua's insights on Patek Philippe and his critical writings, as well as his overall good humor, this text would not have been possible. For this, thank you, Joshua.

“You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation.”

— Patek Philippe, *Generations* campaign motto for male audiences.

#### SCENARIO 1

It rested on the table, heavyweight on the polished wooden oak board. Laid there as loosened from the wrist with fingers carefully unpicking the lock face upwards, it swayed while a swallowed gasp sounded lightly – the wrist’s sweat humidifying the skin where its golden underside had been, a sweat out of nervousness rather than heat. Glimmering at each occasional ray of light, a glare, it came crossing the windowpane, warming it up to the frequency of an adrenaline-high exchange. A jump, a clicking sound, before a feeling of separation began distancing skin from leather, hair from gold. Off it went,

in prospect of temporary isolation – on the table. It lay, finally, when rested by carefully staged hands, to pose cynically in between wishes of ownership and the prospect of a passing. At mid-distance across the table. Weight and a slight reflection underneath in shadows, with cross-angle illuminations of a scar's concavity. A signature: *A Mon Fils*. It hid the dedicated engraving – from sweaty skin to cold wood polish, a presentation to another with an undisclosed message now turned to the oak table. It kept it silent. Tick tack gibberish thrown back and forth in a language foreign to time passing – besides the passing tick tack of the dials muffled within the glass cover. Followed by slight ethereal variations, the cause of which was gesticulation from both sides of the table – movements represented figuratively in the distorted perspective of the reflective glass: four arms gesticulating in a superposition of shadows, a wrist now vacant, an accustomed other and two desiring ones. The shadow play went on, but for no longer than the thirteen minutes, forty-five seconds of previous gesticulation (while it still held on to the flesh of warm pumping communication) plus the one minute and five seconds of unlocking and dispensation – the overall duration amounting to precisely fourteen minutes, fifty seconds. A shout and the feeling of disillusionment falling. Over its glass surface a white wash whooshed, withdrawing arms and hands, previously so gesticulatory. And, throughout, its gold markers circling, pointing to numbers rounding about, summing up, counting. So it remained, for a moment then taken by the fingers of another

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brutish force raising it high and fast from the wood surface. Vibrations and a slight exchange before unloosening; with both hands spreading the bracelets to the fullest extension, then with evident delight in the care of a touch, rounding the wrist it came fitting finely. A pose and an adjustment on a wider wrist diameter, with less hair and a lighter skin. Then a lock. And a new life from the loss of the betting hand of another.

### SCENARIO 2

180° followed by a second half movement counting to 360°, round again, violently it shifted sides at the examination of what faced inside and outside, its leather bracelets spread widely vertical by stern hands of historical verification. As if in a vortex, it danced, slowly yet precisely moving around its axis, back and forth from 180° to 0°, forth 180° then back to 0°, then from 0° to full 360° and back to 180°, and so on. At close scrutiny a breath came closely, loosening a mist veil on its golden underside. It warmed up organically, the humidity residing within the hollows for a while longer, rapidly shaken off with yet another twist: 360° to a radical 0°. At each breath, a reflection fading; at each turn, the return of reflection. Its faces, one gold, one glass, circled undecided – at each turn the gold glimmered in communication with the overly close glasses. Meanwhile, the markers ticked the hour. A roundabout movement, and from time to time *A Mon Fils* closely inspected. The dry

sweat of a rubbing finger sliding on the gold surface, feeling the hollow carving. It felt cold and abused. Though gloved, the finger left insidious remains behind. It dropped carefully on the clothed table – some distance at last. There it stood, laying with monocle upward, the markers passing, the seconds at ease. An argument, or what could only be ethereally perceived as such to it. Then an apparently simple passing of objects from hand to hand, possibly a card, surely a rectangle. Exchanged at the rate of its monetary value, cleaned with a soft cloth, and at last taken out and, once more, to blinding brightness.

SCENARIO 3

Never so charmingly yet so sadly enthralling had it passed on. The lock safely pinched open, it went faster than thought, dropping down, heavy gold on the wooly white carpet. Not long thereafter it resumed. A pair of hands with attentive holding fingers lifting its weight to rest at knee level with hands facing upward, while on the wool a weightless imprint was left behind. It could be resting on the knees themselves. Yet these hands were softer. Now it ticked, faster and clockwise, at the pleasure of others, or at least faster than time seemed to be passing. A movement and a shake, a chit-chat of evident pleasure and slight devotion followed by a fitting around the wrist. A lock, and off it went enamored with a newly found diameter, the skin softer, lighter, the wrist bonier. It would need

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an adjustment, its bracelets tightened and the leather professionally perforated. Yet, for now it hung slightly loose around the wrist. If ever adjusted, which never did happen, it would feel a bodily pulsation violently beating, warming up the metallic coldness of its underbelly. Despite the excitement, not long after it parted, carelessly and without warning. Circularly clockwise it still shook back and forth hanging slightly overweight on a struggling wrist, across corridors overloaded with radiophonic female voices announcing names, calling forth people. Then an uncommon pressure compressing it for the exact cumulative timing of twelve hours, twelve minutes and forty-two seconds. It did not cease counting. Followed by a release to gravity's normality, precisely eight hours back in time. All the while it shook, silently unnoticed save for the slight adjustment of the left hand randomly coming and going. A new sunshine, another heat, a distinct sweat forming on its underside: here, gold never turned cold. It had parted, that much was certain, and apart it remained for the estimated time of two thousand, one hundred and ninety days, of which it remained inoperative for approximately one thousand and ninety five.

### SCENARIO 1.1

A new wrist around which to become customary. And so it had been for the exact timing of one thousand, four hundred and eighty eight hours. It kept counting. A distinct

wrist around which to circumnavigate - thicker, hairier, with a different pumping beat flowing endlessly from hand to arm to the speculative measurement of a body weight and size, yet, all in all, a similar lifestyle, rhythm and schedule. Save for the subtleties, this body could actually be the same as the previous one. It shone at random light and drew attention, but not much more than its equals, of whom each pushed back and forth at a distinct rhythm yet all contemporarily attuned – except for the possibility of mechanical variation or manual adjustment setting some in advance or delay of chronometric time.

#### SCENARIO 2.1

Inside the cabinet it mirrored itself backwards into infinity. Attached to a transparent acrylic wrist by its rounding bracelets it stood as if suspended in the air, or as if hovering in its allocated space. After a moment of loss, it could not measure when, why, or for how long it had, three thousand two hundred and thirty three hours ago, regained its circular movement looping in time. Above, below and all over, carefully displayed throughout the cabinet's various shelves, an array of similar wristwatches, all similar yet distinct in brand, each in its own meticulously arranged space distanced at regular intervals from one another, and each rounding its own individual acrylic wrist, yet all synchronously tick-tacking away their markers. From time to time, a bang would sound from the wall

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clock, leaving all suspended for a moment while the clock gonged – then off they went ticking symphonically again. At an exact moment registered by all, a gush of fresh air came rushing in. The glass panel opened. At last, it was lifted and unloosened from its acrylic wrist – the straps widened, stretched out, regained lost comfort. A snap click-lock and the glass panel closed. It stood sideways, tick-tacking on the counter, loose and comfortable against the cotton. The passage of a soft cloth over the dial and a flood of purple – it reflected more than it remembered. A minute passed, followed by a slight lift upward. A tremor in the air and a convincing move of singularity exhibited: it capsized leaving its carving exposed, *A Non Fils*, handwritten deeply into its underside. A second hand wristwatch, but no less luxuriously personal for that. Three minutes and forty-two seconds and it was back in a velvet case, comfortably sitting in the cushion along with the soft cloth it had been touched by just before. Notwithstanding the darkness, it ticked, albeit muffledly so.

### SCENARIO 3.1

From a closet drawer to a **FedEx**<sup>Express</sup> card box package. Or from murky darkness with a scent of velvet-covered wood to dry dimness. A pull had opened the drawer wide and brought it back to mind. Attentively, it was held and it rested, for a while longer, in suspended conch-shaping hands, its lightness a balancing breathed rhythm, before turning it

sideways to signal the carving. A sigh before wrapping it in bubble plastic. Though diffusely veiled by the improvised plastic dress, it could still be seen ticking a dial through the transparency of the wrap. Time had passed, and though confronted with its own mechanics, wrapped as it now was it could not remember when it had been or for how long the parting had taken place. It too had lost track, the cause of which was self-evidently mechanical. But now it counted again – since, at a given moment lost in time, it had been opened wide from the back, its gold lid removed, and repaired back to customary circularity, tickles included. It had woken up with a sudden tack, tick, tack... When placed inside the cardboard package, though faded out, it could still be heard – it went on routinely. Covered and safely unshakable, then taken from view with a closing top. “Rackkk” went the scotch tape. And with a ding-dong bell it parted loudly out of sight. It barely shook back and forth, not even when an uncommon pressure compressed it for the exact cumulative timing of twelve hours, twelve minutes and forty-two seconds; it never for a moment stopping, then released to gravity’s normality again: precisely eight hours forward in time – plus the accumulation of years of which it had lost track. Listening to an old radio quality Rock 'n' Roll tune muffledly coming from somewhere nearby, then one more stoppage, suspense, a beep bell sound and nothing. Nothing. It waited. Not long after a trip back eight hours in time to a familiar ding-dong bell and the sound of what could only be the expression of surprise. It had come back, returned from a future time.

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Unpacked and resting on white paper background, it tick-tacked mundanely while flashed by a cell phone and then back into a **FedEx** Express card box. It went virtual.

### SCENARIO 1.2

The carving faced downward, compressed against skin with a light rash while the hand gesticulated to the discussion. It had been commented on, “a Patek Philippe,” and it had its companions in the room too. They met daily, with the exception of weekends, and even then it was not uncommon for the call of entrepreneurial duty to bring them together. The pendular movement of the wrists they embraced enabled them to catch a glimpse of each other underneath the cuffs, mistaking each other, from time to time, for gold-bathed cufflinks. All wristwatches and cufflinks meticulously matching the dark blue or the black and brown of suits. Across wooden corridors and wide vistas filtered by glass, they glimmered. As for its presence, its singularity was relative; it was noticed, yet for no other purpose than to acknowledge the necessity of a called-for luxury, or in order to certify one’s own presence through that of others.

### SCENARIO 2.2

Success had kept them together. Furthermore, it had led to the confirmation of a daily symbiosis between what

had by now become a trademark. It had thus, since it had left the cabinet, and, with a feeling of estrangement, fit a new wrist diameter, proven its worth in image-building. It shone softly when subtly revealed from underneath the suit's cuff; then distinctly at each punch squash on the wall, it rushed moving sideways, it did not shake, fall. Loosened, it held strong. While the wrist had grown to the necessity of two extra punch holes in the leather strap, it had also gained some wrinkles in the bracelets, perhaps a scratch (particularly in the dial), but nothing comparable to the aging of the skin around which it had grown together in the entrepreneurial world.

SCENARIO 3.2

Weighed, measured, calculated, tagged. A knot accompanied it now, linking its strap to a band from which hung a white tag. On it, with handwritten blue ink: the model; the year; some notes; and then a stamp – *control final* in a similar hue. A brief examination, then comfy it went, sealed inside the plastic wrap. After cross-checking dates, details, flaws, scratches, all of its engraved history: an approved positive reply, a detailed script and a written copy. And spread out in alphabetical language: *A Non Fils.*

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### SCENARIO 1.3

Until the mark of singularity became strange enough for exclusion. *A Mon Fils*. And out of greed placed in a situation requiring weighing, measuring, calculations and tags.

### SCENARIO 2.3

Until the mark of singularity became strange enough for exclusion. *A Mon Fils*. And out of a long, overdue promotion placed in a situation requiring weighing, measuring, calculations and tags.

### SCENARIO 4

It waited, while in the room a voice gently, though with conviction, announced particularities, interrupted here and again by sounds of movement and plastic scratching on the wooden floor – which could only be the sound of adding, raising, pointing, claiming, “A Patek Philippe wristwatch, in yellow gold, from the *Calatrava* collection. A *grand classique* from Patek Philippe, that is both strict and perfectly well-proportioned. You will have noticed the personalized engraving *To My Son*. on the back. This wristwatch belonged to the same person for many years before he had to part with it for personal reasons.” It went slowly from side to side, exhibited with its straps open

wide, its back to the white cotton pad. “The movement bears the Geneva seal. This embodies the entire know-how of the Geneva manufacture. Decorated bridges and chamfered edges. Each wheel requires forty to sixty operations. The opaline silver dial is very pure and classic. The case has all the distinctive characteristics of the original Calatrava style. The case middle is harmoniously extended by the lugs. The case is specified as water resistant up to twenty-five meters.” Lifted from the pad and exemplarily accelerated forward in time, its function reduced to the sound of its skeleton. “As mentioned previously, this watch was obviously a gift.” Back on the pad, a warm light gathered, and its golden skin shone more radiantly than ever before. Yet it remained in suspense. “For this personally engraved Patek Philippe wristwatch, lot number twenty-eight ... . We start the bidding for the lot twenty-eight at ... .”

tick... tick... ticking...

Then an announcement and an entrance, a reencounter won by will, but backed by money.

ALSO, OR

(instead and previously to the above listed)

Father takes it back from son for lack of responsibility and injury to genealogical pride. *Plus jamais A Mon Fils.*