Tales of Tickton and Tockville



The Case of the Late Lunch

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The Case of the Late Lunch

Tickton was not the only village in the Meridian valley, of course. On the far side of the River Meridian, just beyond the elegant Clock Tower Bridge, lay the village of Tockville. Tickton was old-fashioned and traditional, and time sometimes seemed to have stopped there.

Tockville, on the other hand, was more up-to-date, forward-looking and, it liked to think, more lively. For one thing, it had a few shops, so the villagers of Tickton often crossed the river to shop there – and it had a restaurant and a takeaway. It even had a garage where cars were serviced and repaired – and there was a very modern gastro-pub, ‘Pints and Quartz’.

For all their differences, however, the two villages were similar in one very important way – as in Tickton, all the inhabitants of Tockville were time-pieces – clocks, watches and other ways of time-telling.

In the village of Tockville, the most important event of the day was lunch. Lunchtime was a very serious matter. Everyone in the village had their favourite place to eat, and there were lots of places to choose from.

Those with plenty of money and time to spare enjoyed a leisurely meal at the gastro- pub. At precisely twelve noon every day, the kitchen door of ‘Pints and Quartz’ would swing open, the landlady, Anna Logg, would place the day’s menu board in the gastro-pub doorway and the aroma of gourmet food would drift across the high street.


TEQUANA DAY
DISPENSING CHEMIST
MICK ANNIKLES
GARAGE

At the exact same moment Signor Tempo, the owner of Trattoria di Tempo, would change the sign on his door from ‘Closed’ to ‘Open’, and release the smell of pizza, pasta and pecorone into the village for those who preferred a taste of Italy.

A few doors further down the street, Tai Ming, the proprietor of Tai Ming Chinese Fast Food Takeaway, always smiled cheerfully at his wife, Mei You, motioning to her to place the first ladle of the day into the pan of rice as he went to open the door.

Those who wanted even faster food would slip into Sunni Dhal’s general store and buy ready-made sandwiches, pies, cakes and soft drinks.

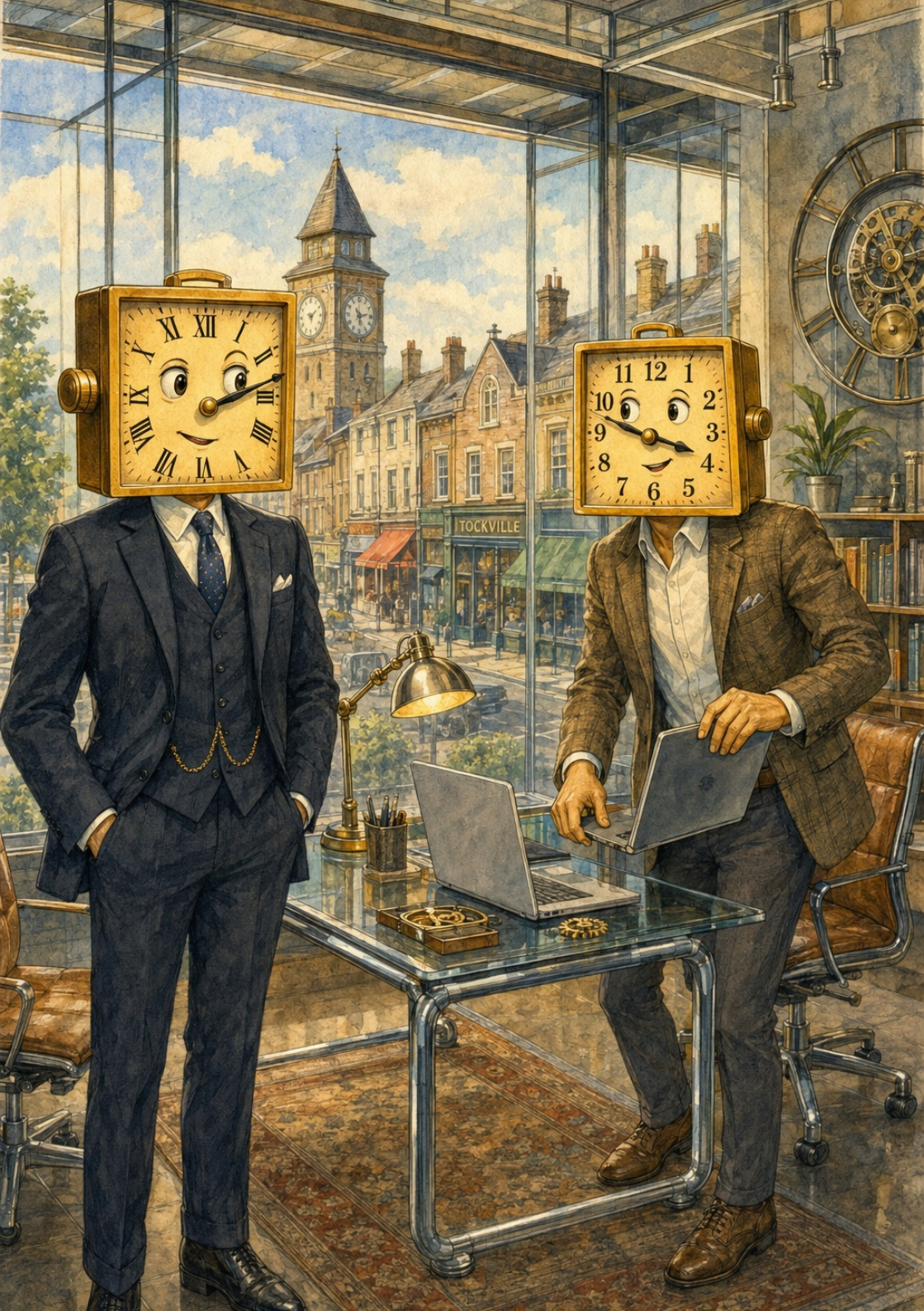
The only shop that did not open at midday was owned by Tequana Day, the village chemist. She always opened her shop just as lunch ended, because she knew her customers – after they had all eaten so well she always sold a great many indigestion pills.

On this particular Monday, Philippe, the French part-owner of ‘Trois Temps’, the time management therapy centre at the end of the village straightened up from his computer and turned to the other part-owner, his partner, Patek, and said, “My computer says it is midday. Do we wish to eat?”

“We do,” answered Patek, and rose to his feet. Of all the businesses in town, Philippe and Patek’s was the most exact and disciplined, and like to keep everything timed precisely.

They stepped out of their chrome and glass flat, where they worked from home, and set out down Tockville High Street.

The first shop they reached was Tequana’s, which was closed as usual. A little further on was Sunni Dhal’s General Store, which of course was open all hours. Philippe looked at Patek, who said, “No. I think a sit- down meal today.”


TOCKVILLE

They walked a little further, but Tai Ming's door was still firmly shut. "Perhaps a meal at a slower pace," suggested Philippe.

They were surprised to see that the sign outside Trattoria di Tempo was still reading 'Closed', and so moved on towards the gastro-pub.

"Oh!" said Philippe and Patek together.

'Pints and Quartz' was not open. There was no menu board outside. There was no aroma of delicious food. There was no sign of Anna Logg.

The two looked at each other. "Are you sure the computer was accurate?" Patek asked.

"Of course."

As Philippe spoke he caught sight of Colonel Half-Hunter hurrying along the road from Clock Tower Bridge, looking quite worried. "Oh dear," the colonel said. "I am too late."


PINTS & QUARTZ

“No, Colonel, it is the restaurants that are late,” Philippe assured him.

“No,” insisted the colonel. “I am too late. I meant to warn the village about time, but I am not in time, and time has caught up with me and time has now run away, so I am too late.”

Philippe and Patek looked at each other. “Perhaps you could explain,” suggested Patek.

“Yes, yes indeed. Let me have a word with Anna Logg.”

The colonel approached the gastro-pub and knocked on the door.

Anna Logg answered. “We’re not open yet, Colonel,” she said. “We don’t open for two more hours, at midday. As a regular customer you should know that, sir.”

Patek, Philippe and the colonel all spoke together. “It is midday,” they said.


PINTS & QUARTZ

“No, no, no,” protested Anna. “I just heard the bell at St. Chronos in Tickton chime ten times. It’s two hours yet to opening time.”

“Are you sure?” asked the colonel.

“Of course I’m...” Anna stopped and peered closely at the colonel’s face. “Is your moustache right?” she asked.

“Indeed it is.” His facial hair indicated twelve noon.

“Oh dear.”

“Alas, madam, as you say, ‘Oh dear’,” the colonel replied. “You see, yesterday, after the Tickton picnock, I mean, picnic, Re Peter forgot to wind the click, so eight o’cluck did not chime until ten o’clack, so both of the villages are two hours behind.”

“I think I understand,” said Patek.

“I wish I did,” said Philippe.

“My word,” said Anna Log, “lunch will be late.”

“Ah,” said the colonel, “but the good news is, so will your clientele, so all is not lost.”

The colonel turned to Patek and Philippe. “If I go and tell Signor Tempo, can you spread the news around the rest of Tockville?” he asked.

“Of course,” they agreed, and the three bringers of news split up.

Colonel Half-Hunter went to the trattoria, knocked on the door and explained the situation to Signor Tempo.

“So,” said the pizza shop owner, “now is late, but is also early. Is notta yet pasta time.”

“Well, yes,” the colonel replied. “It is in fact past opening time, but in effect that is not yet a problem.”

“So, is not yet pasta time.”

“Yes,” said the colonel patiently, “it is past the time...”


TRATTORIA
DI TEMPO
OPEN

“No, no, no,” cried Tempo. “Is past the time, but not yet pasta time – time to eat pasta.”

“Ah,” said the colonel. “You do get it.”

“You wanna pizza?”

“Of course,” the colonel declared, and stepped into the trattoria, where Signor Tempo proudly turned the sign around to read ‘Open’.


TAI MING
CHINESE FAST FOOD TAKEAWAY

Patek went to Tai Ming’s takeaway. “Good afternoon,” he said.

“No, it is not” answered Tai Ming. “It is ‘Good morning’.”

“Actually, no,” Patek said, and explained the problem.

“Ah, good,” responded Tai Ming. “Longer cooking makes tastier food. No problem!”


MAH-JONG
MAH-JONG
PIANO MUSIC
GARIBALDI
LEMON CREAMS
OAT BISCUITS
GINGER NUTS
CHOCOLATE CHIPS
SHORTBREAD

Meanwhile Philippe had entered Sunni Dhal's General Store to the sound of the little bell above the door. Sunni's shop was a wonder; it sold absolutely everything – clock oil, jars of pickle, cotton thread, winding keys, fresh apples, leather straps, mah jong sets, piano music – and if she didn't happen to have something in stock she ran a twenty-four hour delivery service. She also knew everyone in town and what their favourite biscuit was.

"Good morning, Philippe," she said. "What a delight to have you in my shop again. How is Patek? Garibaldi, isn't it?"

"Fine, thank you," Philippe said. He was always pleased to see Sunni, who lived up to her name with a sunny smile and a cheerful welcome for anyone who entered her shop, even if they did not actually buy anything. "How are you? Garibaldi, yes."

"Fine, too, thank you. Anything else besides the biscuits? Lemon creams for Patek?"

"Might as well, yes." Philippe went on to explain about the confusion with the clock.

"Oh good," Sunni said, looking on the bright side as usual. "Everyone will have had two extra hours in bed and so will be two hours hungrier. I had better prepare some more sandwiches."


TONIC
TIMES PILLS
CATARRH POWDER
NERVINE PILLS
TOCKVILLE
CHEMIST
CARING FOR OUR COMMUNITY

That left only Tequana Day's dispensing chemist's shop, which the colonel approached warily. Tequana was well known for her precision and accuracy in all things, her powers of observation and her sharp tongue.

Inside her shop the shelves were filled with tiny bottles, labelled powders, and mysterious remedies for every imaginable mechanical complaint. No matter what the ailment – skin, nails, loose springs, over- wound mainspring – Tequana Day had a treatment for each of them.

She answered the door carrying a clipboard and pencil. "You do not look unwell, Colonel," she said.

"Indeed, dear lady, I am by no means unwell."

"In which case I take it you are not here for medicine. Nor are you unwashed, unkempt or unshaven and your breath is sweet, so it is not a question of soap, shampoo, shaving cream or toothpaste, I presume."

“Madam, I am the bearer of important information. It is not ten o’clock, as you may think; it is in fact...”

“I know,” she said. “In fact, it’s...” She leaned forward and examined his face through her pince-nez. “...twelve forty-five, I see. Thank you.”

“But how did you know? Before you read my moustache, I mean.”

“Observation, my dear colonel. When the sun rose this morning I noticed that there were no chimes from Tickton clock. Therefore I determined that either the clock was faulty or the sun was wrong, and as you know, when you have eliminated the impossible whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth, Now you must excuse me. I shall be encountering a large number of upset stomachs in a short while, a little later than usual, and I must stand by to repel burpers.”

The colonel nodded nervously and retreated through the open door.


MICK ANNIKLE —
CAR REPAIRS

When the three met again in the middle of the town square, the colonel asked, “Is that everyone? Who else needs to know?”

There was a moment’s silence, and then: “Has anyone told Mick?” Philippe asked.

“No,” replied the colonel. “Let’s go.”

Down the street, they heard a cheerful clatter coming from the open doors of a building whose main sign read ’Mick Annikle Auto Repairs’ with, underneath, ‘Make Your Car Run Like Clockwork’.

Inside, Mick Annikle himself, the owner of the repair shop, was head first inside the bonnet of a small motorcar. He had a spanner in one hand and a sandwich smeared with grease and oil in the other. In fact, most of the rest of him was smeared with grease and oil, too.

“Mick?” Patek called.

The overalls began to wriggle and emerge from the bonnet. Then a cheerful clock face appeared from the area of the engine. “Hi!” Mick said. “Something wrong with the car. Patek? Hi, Philippe, Hello, Colonel.” He put out his hand for the colonel to shake but then remembered the oily sandwich and pulled it back again, grinning. “Sorry.”

“Mick! Is that your lunch?” Philippe asked.

“I couldn’t wait,” Mick replied. “I know it’s early, but I’m starving. It doesn’t matter, though. I often work through lunch hour. No big deal.”

“But lunch hasn’t started,” Philippe said.

“No, it’s finished,” replied Mick, taking the last bite of his sandwich.

“So you don’t go to a restaurant for lunch?” the colonel asked.

“No time, no time,” said Mick. “It’s all the same to me – I never notice the hours

passing when I’m poking about in an engine or a gear box. Lunch time, dinner time, makes no difference to me. So, what can I do for you?”

The colonel shook his head. “Nothing,” he said, “and it looks as if we can’t do anything for you, either. Goodbye, Mick.”

The garage man waved happily and dived back into the car.

The colonel, Patek and Philippe strolled back to the centre of the village. When they arrived there, they heard in the distance the sound of Tickton church clock striking twelve.

Immediately all work in the village ceased. The inhabitants of Tockville stopped whatever they were doing and came out into the street, where they formed neatly into four groups. Those who could afford it headed for ‘Pints and Quartz’, those who wanted a leisurely lunch made for the trattoria, those who wanted feeding quickly dropped into Tai Ming’s Chinese Fast Food Takeaway, and the snacksters formed an orderly queue inside Sunni’s store.

Only three members of the community did not join a group. “We have spent our entire lunch hour helping people,” Patek said.


PINTS & QUARTZ

“That’s a good thing to do,” observed the colonel.”

“And now that it’s two o’clock we must go back to work,” Philippe sighed.

“Will the boss be angry if you don’t?” asked the colonel.

“We are the bosses,” said Patek.

“In that case, why not give yourselves permission to take the afternoon off and enjoy a long, delicious lunch?” the colonel asked.

Philippe and Patek looked at each other, tempted.

“My treat, as a thank you for your help,” the colonel suggested, and that decided the matter.

The three of them strolled back towards ‘Pints and Quartz’.

“Lunch is a moveable feast,” Patek observed, “and time should be enjoyed.”

“Better late lunch than never,” Philippe said.

“Indeed,” agreed the colonel, “and, after all, in the word ‘lunchtime’, although ‘time’ is important, lunch always comes first.”

THE END



LOOK OUT FOR MORE

TICK TOCK TALES

COMING SOON

MORE TALES FROM TICKTON AND TOCKVILLE

The Case of the Missing Morning

The Case of the Late Lunch

The Day That Would Not Move On

The Day That Missed an Hour

The Incident of Hesitation

Pendulum and the Perfect Day

Thunder in the Hills

Whiling Away the Hours

Happy Birthday, Lord Longcase!

Time for Christmas

Ring in the New

Organising Tom Purdue

TERRY MORGAN