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opening extract from

Madame Pamplemousse and the Time-travelling Cafe

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Chapter One

In the city of Paris, in the district of Montmartre, at the top of a steep, winding hill, there is a café. An old-fashioned and elegantly furnished café, with polished wooden tables, frosted-glass windows and an awning of



striped gold and green.

Inside, the walls are adorned with posters: vintage advertisements for drinks from ages past, such as Mermaid Madeira, Green Fairy Liqueur, Dark Horse Chocolate and Red Devil Lemonade.

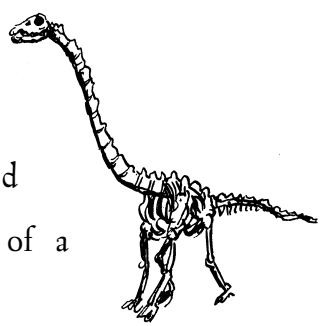
Other strange-looking antiques are distributed all around – pieces of marble and old statues, carved figureheads and masks – giving the café the appearance of a small museum. And this is perhaps how it acquired its title: The Café of Lost Time.

However, the true reason for its name is a secret, a secret housed within the gleaming, silver steam-powered espresso coffee machine

sitting atop the café bar.

The machine was invented by the café's owner, whose name is Monsieur Moutarde. Moutarde was once a famous scientist, a professor at the university, who resigned from his professorship quite suddenly one day, after making the most remarkable discovery.

The discovery came to him on a Sunday afternoon while out with his nephew and niece. They were looking round the dinosaur gallery in the Museum of Natural History, when Monsieur Moutarde paused to admire the skeleton of a diplodocus.



There was something about its mere presence there that never ceased to amaze him – how this was no replica but the actual bones of a creature that had once walked the Earth, many millions of years ago. And yet here it was standing right next to him.

Afterwards they went to a café where Monsieur Moutarde ordered a particular kind of orange-flavoured cake that had been a favourite of his as a child. He had not eaten one since and only ordered it on a whim. But at the first taste he had such an intense memory of childhood that, for a second, he actually believed himself back in the past.



'Eureka!' he exclaimed, suddenly leaping from his chair. The other

people in the café looked up warily, although his niece and nephew didn't bat an eye, for they were used to this sort of behaviour from their uncle.



'That's it!' he cried euphorically, pacing briskly up and down. 'The taste brings back the memory, just like you're really there. So you'd only have to trick the universe into agreeing with your senses and . . . *sacré bleu*! Why, then you would have time travel!'

'Except it wouldn't work!' he explained later, dejectedly, to a friend. 'Tricking the universe is no problem – that's the easy part – but it would only work with your own memories. What about times you've never experienced?

Or times before human beings even existed?'

His friend shrugged. 'Surely it's only a matter of imagination?' she said.

'Well, yes, of course, but an imagination of genius!'

'That shouldn't pose too much of a problem,' said his friend. And indeed, for her, it would not, since her name was Madame Pamplemousse, and she was the greatest culinary genius the world has ever known.

So together they invented the Taste-Automated Space-Time Déjà-Vu Generator. Monsieur Moutarde designed the machine, while Madame Pamplemousse devised the recipes – special blends of ingredients whose flavours vividly recalled the past. These ingre-

dients would then be fed into the Generator, where they would be subatomically blended with quantum froth and spritzed with space-time foam. Finally, the resulting liquid would be dispensed into a cup and look much like a small black coffee. Except that whoever drank this liquid would be transported through time and space.



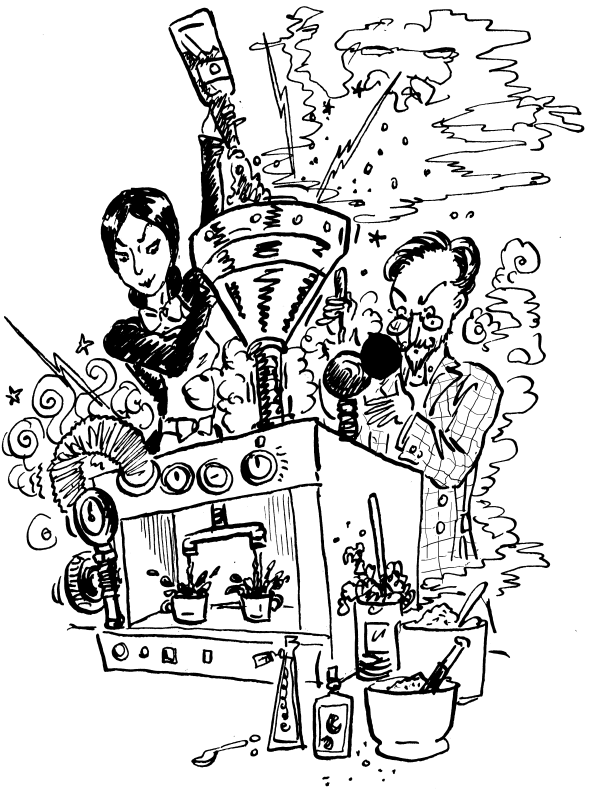
No sooner had they built the machine, however, than they realised the potential dangers of their discovery. For who knew what terrible uses it might be put to if the Generator fell into the wrong hands?

So Madame Pamplemousse and Monsieur Moutarde chose to hide it. Given its

remarkable similarity to a coffee machine, Moutarde had the ingenious idea of concealing it inside a café. And so he resigned from his position at the university and became a café owner instead.

The café actually did quite well and acquired something of a reputation throughout Paris. This was partly due to its unusual decor and museum-like appearance, and partly due to the strange rumours it attracted.

It was widely believed, for example, that the café was haunted. For there were reports of people glancing through the windows at night, and seeing figures inside who would then mysteriously vanish before their eyes. Or there was another, particularly fanciful story





from someone claiming to have seen a cat standing on its hind legs and leaning against the bar. The cat had also, apparently, worn an eyepatch and had been sipping an apéritif.

Madame Pamplemousse ran a shop called 'Edibles' on the banks of the river, just off the main street down a narrow, winding alley. It was a small and rather unremarkable-looking shop but, in fact, sold some of the most extraordinary food ever tasted.

It had, for example, several hundred different cheeses, some of them dating back many centuries. One in particular was so oozing and putrid that it had to be kept

chained up beneath a thick marble lid.

Among the giant cured meats hanging from the ceiling there was Smoked Pterodactyl Wing, Salted Ichthyosaur Fin and Triceratops Tail with Garlic. All around the walls, winding up to the ceiling, there were shelves packed with jars and tiny bottles, with their contents written on the labels in fine, purple script: Pickled Tarantula Legs in Tarragon Vinegar, Black Mamba Tongues in Red Wine, Peppered Dragon Spit with Fairy-Ring Mushroom and Kraken Tentacle with Rose-Petal Jam.



She also sold one particular delicacy which had neither a name nor any ingredients on the

label. This was because the ingredients were a secret, for it was The Most Incredible Edible Ever Tasted.

Madame Pamplemousse lived above the shop with her cat, Camembert, a stray who had wandered in off the streets one night, after being involved in a fight. During the fight, Camembert had nearly died and lost one of his eyes, but Madame Pamplemousse had nursed him back to health. And ever since they had lived together very happily. They would run the shop by day and, come sundown, would often share a bottle of Violet-Petal Wine on Madame Pamplemousse's balcony above the city. And often they might be joined by their good friend Madeleine.

Madeleine was a girl who lived nearby above a restaurant called the Hungry Snail. She had recently been adopted by the restaurant's owners, Monsieur and Madame Cornichon. This was only one of the incredible things that had happened to Madeleine since stumbling across Madame Pamplemousse's shop. Another was that she herself had been discovered as an exceptionally talented cook.

However, this did have the slight drawback that Madeleine was regularly hounded by the press and television companies trying to persuade her to appear on children's cookery shows. These offers she would always decline, preferring instead to remain anonymous. But she could not prevent people from

taking her picture and printing it in the newspapers. And this is why, bright and early one morning, she received a visitor at the Hungry Snail.

