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Opening extract from

The Unlikely Outlaws

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FROM THE DESK OF

ADRIAN DONGLE

Dear Mrs Hendrix

My name is Adrian Dongle and I publish children's books. I am a big fan of Philip Ardagh's stories.

A few weeks ago, I met Sir Philip at a cake-eating competition and asked him if he'd be interested in writing a book for me.

He had his hands (and mouth) full at the time and said that I should get in touch with him through you. He mentioned something about really wanting to write a book about some little green men. (At least, I think that's what he said. There was lots of chewing and crumbs.)

Would it be possible to arrange a meeting?

Very best wishes

Adrian Dongle

Adrian Dongle
Publisher

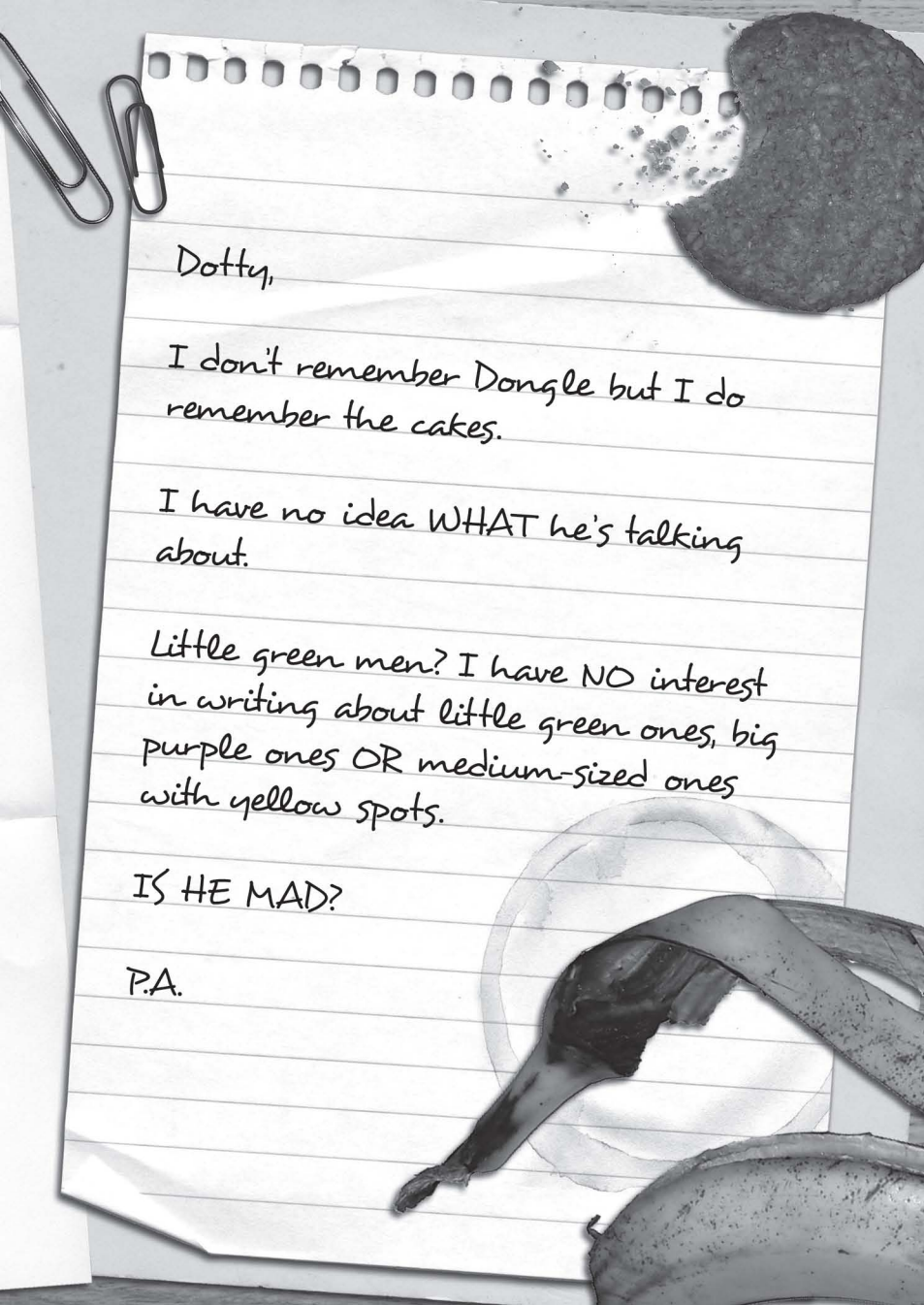
Sir Philip

What do you want to do about this?

Do you really want to write a book about little green men?

Do you want a meeting?

Dotty


Dotty,

I don't remember Dongle but I do remember the cakes.

I have no idea WHAT he's talking about.

Little green men? I have NO interest in writing about little green ones, big purple ones OR medium-sized ones with yellow spots.

IS HE MAD?

P.A.

AH

ARDAGH HOUSE

Dear Mr Dongle

Thank you for your recent letter. Sir Philip remembers your meeting at the cake-eating competition with great fondness. (He has some of the cake wrappers stuck in a special scrapbook.)

Unfortunately, he has no memory of saying that he wanted to write about aliens, little green ones or otherwise.

Would you be interested in meeting him to discuss other book ideas?

Yours sincerely

Dotty Hendrix

Dotty Hendrix (Mrs)

FROM THE DESK OF

ADRIAN DONGLE

Dear Mrs Hendrix

I'm delighted that Sir Philip recalls our meeting.

I'm sorry that I misunderstood what he said between huge bites of cake.

I would very much like to meet up with Sir Philip to talk about any ideas he might have. Could we do this sooner rather than later because I have to fly to America next month?

Thank you.

Fingers crossed!

Very best wishes

Adrian Dongle

Adrian Dongle
Publisher

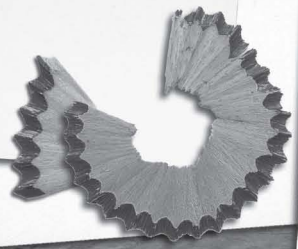
Sir Philip,

As you can see from his letter, Mr Dongle wants:

1. to hear your ideas
2. to meet up soon

Interested?

Dotty



AH

ARDAGH HOUSE

Dear Mr Dongle

I'm pleased to say that Sir Philip is very excited by the idea of writing a Robin-Hood-type tale. He said that it would be fun, and he even wrote the word 'FUN' in capital letters. (He usually only uses capital letters if he's written me a note when he's annoyed, such as when I forget to buy more bananas on the way back from collecting his dry-cleaning.) Would you be interested?

He is eager to meet as soon as possible to discuss the idea. Would next Wednesday be possible? He could meet you at lunchtime.

Yours sincerely

Dotty Hendrix

Dotty Hendrix (Mrs)

FROM THE DESK OF

ADRIAN DONGLE

Dear Mrs Hendrix

Wednesday would be perfect.

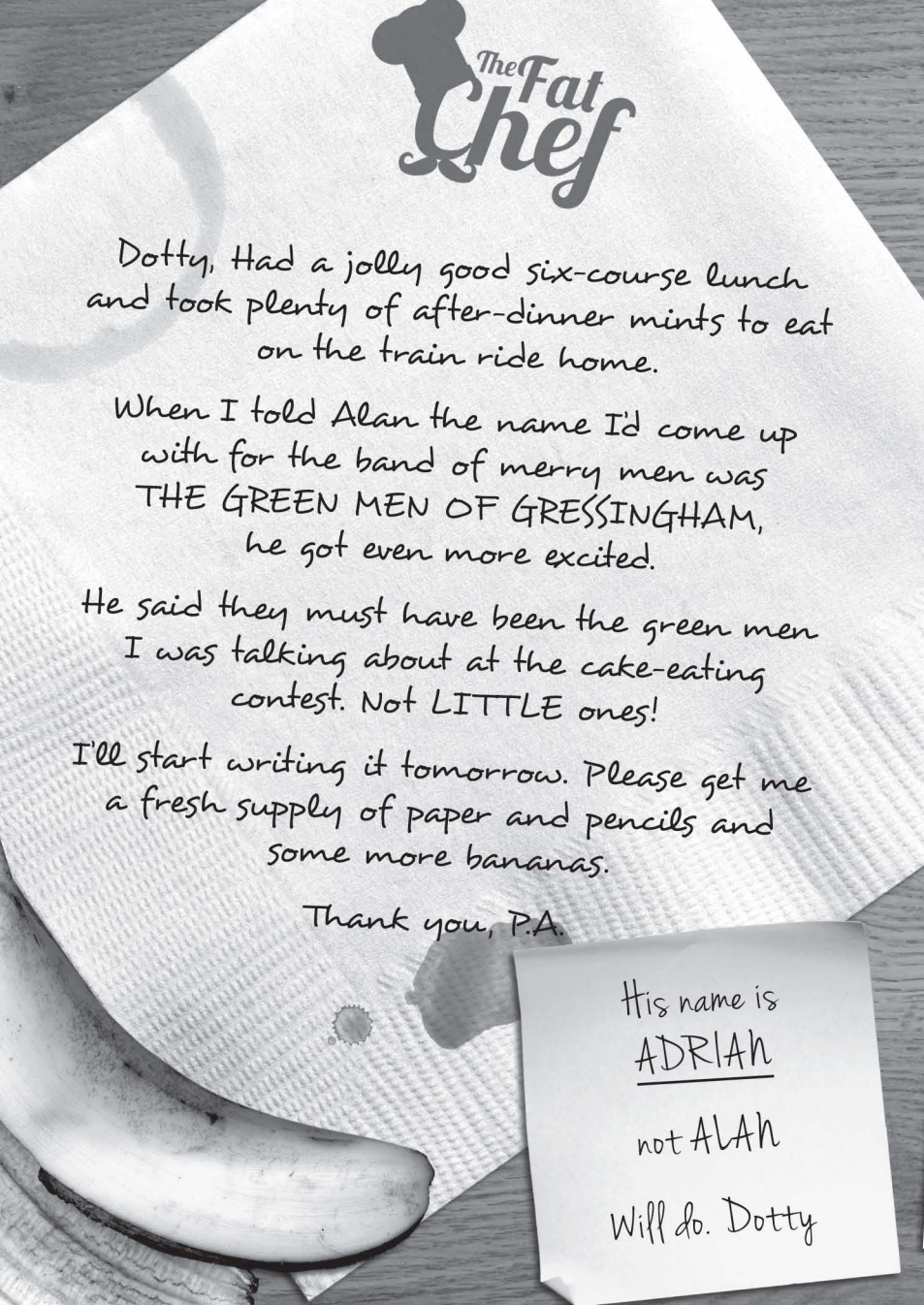
I've booked a table at The Fat Chef for one o'clock. I look forward to seeing Sir Philip then.

Very best wishes

Adrian Dongle

Adrian Dongle
Publisher




The Fat Chef
Dotty, Had a jolly good six-course lunch and took plenty of after-dinner mints to eat on the train ride home.
When I told Alan the name I'd come up with for the band of merry men was THE GREEN MEN OF GRESSINGHAM, he got even more excited.
He said they must have been the green men I was talking about at the cake-eating contest. Not LITTLE ones!
I'll start writing it tomorrow. Please get me a fresh supply of paper and pencils and some more bananas.
Thank you, P.A.
His name is ADRIAh
not ALAh
Will do. Dotty

AH

ARDAGH HOUSE

Dear ~~Alex~~ Adrian,

Here it is: THE GREEN MEN OF GRESSINGHAM.

I had such fun writing this I even gave up watching my favourite Australian antiques cookery programme so I could work through my lunch-breaks every day.

Hope you like it too.

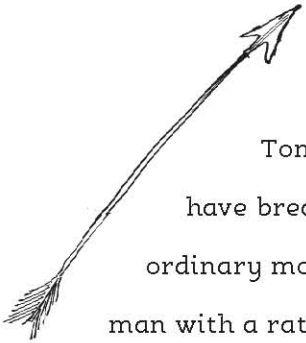
Happy reading.

Philip



Chapter 1
INTO THE UNKNOWN

Tom Dashwood was up before the cock crowed, which wasn't as early as you might imagine because it was a Friday. The cock always had a lie-in on Fridays. It was still pretty early, though, and the servants had only been up five hours when Tom appeared in the great hall. The straw the servants used for their bedding had long since been cleared away, and Cook had laid some breakfast on the long table.



Tom and his family didn't usually have breakfast together, but this was no ordinary morning. This was because a big man with a rather squishy hat had arrived at their manor house the day before. His name was Able Morris and he'd been sent by Tom's uncle, Lord Dashwood, to bring Tom back to Dashwood Castle. There the boy could train to be a page.

Training to be a page was the first step towards becoming a real, live knight. No wonder Tom had been so excited that he'd hardly slept. Ever since he could remember, he'd been looking forward to going to Dashwood Castle to train to be one of his uncle's knights. And now, at long last, that day had come. He'd spent much of the night imagining himself in sword fights or jousts with the sound of horses' hooves and cheering

crowds thundering in his ears.

It was Tom's mother, Lady Dashwood, who thought that a farewell breakfast would be a nice idea. It was one last chance to spend a little time with her son before he left. She was very pleased for him but, at the same time, she was sad to see him go. Most mums are like that.



Because it was so early they all drank small beer instead of the strong stuff. (They never drank water from their well because it was usually a horrible brown colour and tasted like mud. They always drank beer instead, and 'small beer' was the weakest.) Tom ate thick slices of bread full of seeds and had an apple too.

Now it came to it, his mother wasn't

hungry so she chewed her hanky instead. She had big bags under her eyes and looked as though she'd also been awake all night. That was because she *had* been awake all night. She'd been thinking of her little boy leaving home.

"I propose a toast," said Tom's father, Sir Simon Dashwood, rising to his feet. "To my son, Thomas, on his first step on the road to chivalry and honour!"



"Chivalry and honour," agreed Able Morris, and everyone raised their goblets or tankards to their lips. Tom felt so proud that his face glowed a very nice shade of red.

"We must take our leave of you now, Sir Simon," said Able Morris. "Your son and I have a long journey and a dusty road ahead of us."