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Opening extract from

Green Men of Gressingham

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It wasn't normal for Tom and his family to have breakfast together. But this was not a normal Friday.

The day before, a big man had come to the Manor House. He wore a floppy hat that looked like a soft, round loaf of bread. His name was Able Morris. He had been sent by Tom's uncle, Lord Dashwood, to take Tom back to Dashwood Castle so that he could train to be a page.

In those days a boy had to train to be a page and then a squire, and then at last he could become a real, live knight!

Tom had been so excited that he could not sleep. He'd always longed to go to Dashwood Castle to train to be a knight. And now, at last, that day had come.

He'd spent a lot of the night thinking about mock battles. He could hear the sound of horses' hooves and the cheers of the crowds.



Tom's mum, Lady Ann, had planned a family breakfast to say goodbye. This way she could spend a little more time with her son before he left. She was happy for *him* but sad to see him go. Most mums are like that.



Everyone drank beer for breakfast. They never drank water from their well because it was a horrid, brown colour and tasted like mud.

Now the day had come at last, Tom's mum wasn't hungry and her eyes were red. She'd been lying awake all night. She'd been thinking of her little boy Tom who had to leave home.

"Let's drink to my son," said Tom's dad, Sir Simon, rising to his feet. "To Tom, as he sets out to win honour and glory!"

"Honour and glory," Able Morris said after him, and everyone lifted their goblets to their lips. Tom felt so proud that his face glowed bright red.

"We must say goodbye now, Sir Simon," said Able Morris. "Tom and I have a long way to go."

Everyone, even the servants, went to see Tom off.

Lady Ann's hanky was wet with tears. "Be brave and true, Tom," she said.

Tom's dad gave him a hug. Able Morris got onto his huge horse, Ferdy, and pulled Tom up to sit behind him.

Tom hoped that they wouldn't ride too fast. He could not put his arms round Able Morris's waist. He was much too fat.

Able Morris turned round and looked at Tom. "Time we were off!" he said.

Everyone yelled "goodbye" and "good luck" at them as they set off to ride to Dashwood Castle.

Chapter 2
Gressingham Forest

At first they passed places Tom knew well. He'd been to them with his dad – the village, the church, the field where the Harvest Fair was held each year.

Then they were riding past places that Tom had only ever seen from far off.

When Tom looked back he could no longer see his home. All he could see was the very top of the church tower.