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Opening extract from

The Donut Diaries

Written by

Dermot Milligan

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THE DONUT DIARIES

by Dermot Milligan



as told by Anthony McGowan

CORGI

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To Miss Eleanor Goldthorpe,
fairest of all the world's godchildren.

Tuesday 5 September

'No more arguments: either you see the nutritionist or you go to Camp Fatso in the next holiday.'

My mum could be pretty scary at times. Not zombie scary, but scary like thin ice over deep water.

We'd just watched the DVD that Camp Fatso had sent through the post. It's safe to say that the DVD is *not* aimed at the kids. It's most definitely aimed at the parents. We watched scenes of

terrible torture. Fat kids are made to eat porridge in the morning. Then they are forced to run across miles of barren countryside, wearing vests and shorty shorts. Every five minutes they are compelled to lie on the ground and do press-ups.

For lunch there are leaves. Could be cabbage. Could be lettuce. Could be dandelion. But definitely leaves.

Then there is another cross-country run.

At dinner time the fat kids get fed stuff that looks a lot like the breakfast porridge, watered down.

From somewhere deep in my mind I realize that this stuff goes under the much feared name of 'gruel'.

No telly, no computers, no games consoles. For fun there is Snakes and Ladders and a jigsaw puzzle of some flowers.

The last scene shows the fat kids lying like corpses on beds so narrow their chubby butts flow out over the edges, like lava.

You know how in *The Lord of the Rings* the Balrog, with its Whip of Fire and really bad breath, is the one thing that Gandalf truly fears? Well, Camp Fatso was my Balrog.

'I AM NOT GOING THERE!' I said. 'NO WAY.'

It wasn't just the horror of the place – it was the stigma as well. What if word leaked out that I was at fat camp? It's the sort of thing that destroys your reputation for ever.

'Then you have to go and see the nutritionist,' said Mum. 'You'll like her. She's nice. I met her at my power yoga class.'

I looked at my dad. He'd come out of the toilet – where he spends most of his time –

specially to watch the DVD. He had a sorry, pained expression on his face. It might have been sympathy. It might have been wind. Either way, there was no hope there. He wasn't going to stand up to Mum.

So now you see why I was sitting in a room that smelled faintly of puke. The puke smell was partly covered over with pine air-freshener, but only in the way that a kid might cover up his mouth after saying a bad word.

Straight away the puke-and-pine combo set off all kinds of scenes playing in my head, most of them involving projectile vomiting over Christmas trees. I guess that's the sort of imagination I've got.

I'd just been weighed, prodded and poked, with me wearing nothing but my boxer shorts,

so I wasn't in a great mood. If I'd known I was going to be standing there in nothing but my undies I'd have made sure they weren't my old T. Rex pants. Yep, that's a pair of underpants with a picture of a roaring T. Rex on them.

NOTE TO SELF: THROW AWAY, BURN, NUKE OR OTHERWISE UTTERLY DESTROY YOUR DINOSAUR PANTS BEFORE YOU START AT BIG SCHOOL ON MONDAY!!!!

'How many today, Dermot?'

The lady sitting in front of me smiled. It was the sort of smile that makes you wish you were holding a sharp stick, maybe with something smelly on the end of it. The sort of smelly thing that might recently have been inside a dog. But that's the sad thing about sharp sticks with

something unpleasant on the end – you never seem to have one when you really need it.

'How many what?'

I said that, but I knew what she was talking about. I knew, and she knew that I knew. But she said it anyway, still smiling that horrible smile of hers.

'*Donuts,* Dermot. That's why you're here. I know all about your little problem from your mother. So, tell me, how many donuts have you eaten today?'

The carpet was suddenly really interesting. 'Dunno. Haven't been keeping count.'

'*Roughly* how many?'

The woman was wearing a white coat just like a real doctor, and her name badge said 'Dr Morlock', but I reckon she just got a certificate off the internet and she was no

more a doctor than I was an astronaut.*

For a nutritionist you'd have to say that she didn't look that healthy. You know in those movies where the hero's making his way along a dark tunnel lit only by a spluttering torch, and then a spiked booby trap sort of whips in front of him, with the remains of the last guy who came along the tunnel speared on the end of it? And it's basically just bones but with a few tatty bits of skin attached? Well, that's sort of what she looked like but, you know, *slightly* less dead.

I sighed. 'One or two.'

Dr Morlock's smile changed. It was now the sort of smile you'd turn on a kid who had porridge for brains. I resented that. It wasn't fair. I didn't have porridge for brains. Or for breakfast.

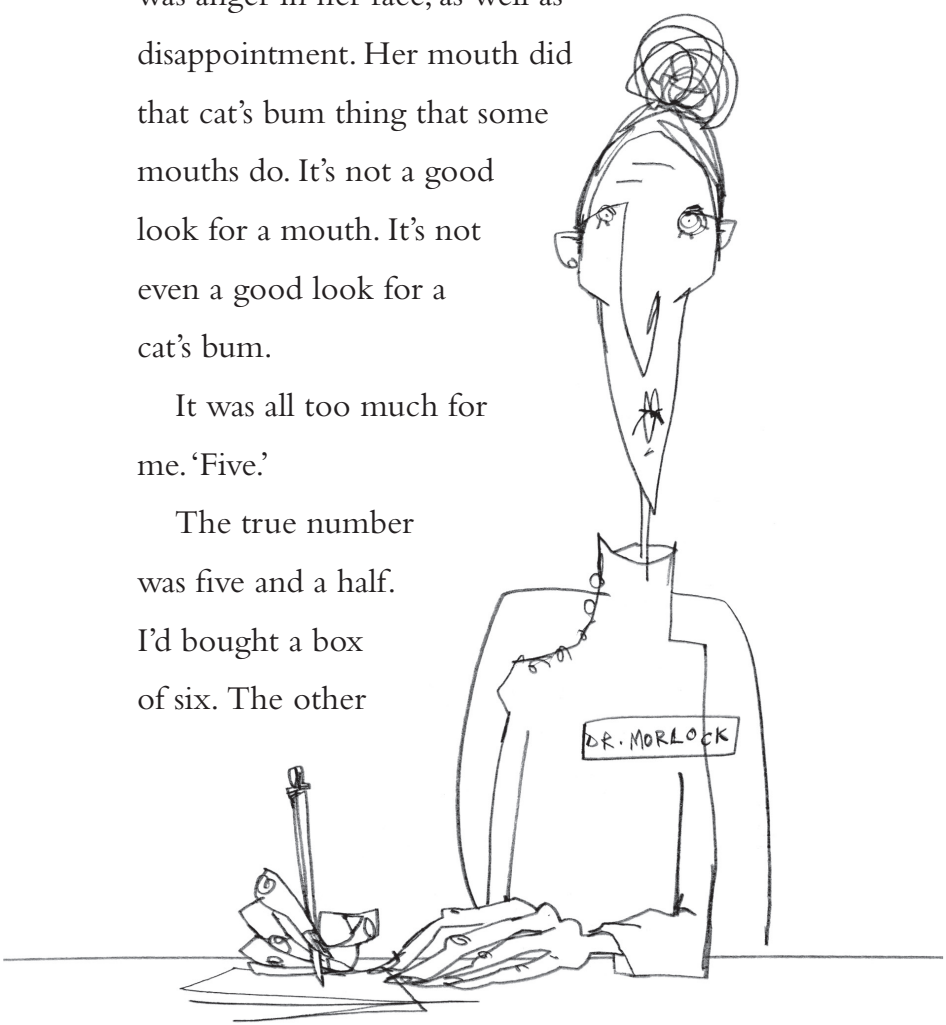
* Just to clarify – I am not an astronaut. I am a twelve-year-old schoolboy.

I shrugged. 'Three, maybe.'

Dr Morlock stopped smiling. Now she looked like I'd peed on her chips. Except she probably didn't eat chips. Peed on her lettuce, then. There was anger in her face, as well as disappointment. Her mouth did that cat's bum thing that some mouths do. It's not a good look for a mouth. It's not even a good look for a cat's bum.

It was all too much for me. 'Five.'

The true number was five and a half. I'd bought a box of six. The other



half-donut was burning a hole in my trouser pocket.

Dr Morlock shook her head slowly, satisfied at last. 'That really is too many donuts.'

I nodded, but that was just for show. The notion of 'too many donuts' didn't make much sense to me. It would be like saying 'You've got too much money,' or 'You're too good at football.'*

'What I'm going to ask you to do, Dermot, is to write a diary in which you keep a record of all the donuts you eat.'

'A donut diary?'

'Yes, if that's how you'd like to think of it.'

Mmmm . . . that could have been worse. I liked thinking about donuts. It was the next best thing

* For the record, I don't have any money and I'm not that great at football.

to eating them. So writing about them wouldn't be *so* bad, would it?

'But not just how many you eat,' continued the mad nutritionist. 'You must also write down your feelings.'

'FEELINGS?!'

Writing about feelings . . . That was *completely* different. Feelings are for the kind of kids who like flower arranging and cute puppies and poetry. Suddenly I was in a whole new world of pain.

'Yes, *feelings*, because it is your *feelings* about your food that are the problem here.'

'Not to me they're not. I like donuts. Is that a crime?'

'It's a crime against good health.'

There was no arguing with Dr Morlock.

'And I've prepared this diet sheet specially for you as well.' She waved a piece of paper at me,

like a Jedi with a lightsaber. 'Why don't you ask your mother to step in now, and we'll discuss it together?'

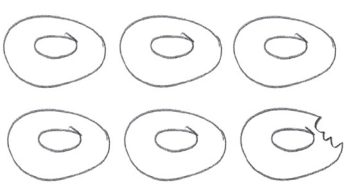
My mum was in the waiting room, reading a yoga magazine. Can you imagine – a magazine about yoga . . . ? It's like having a magazine about verrucas or belly-button fluff. Truly, old people are weird.

When Mum came in, Doc Morlock lost the cat-bum face and went all smiley.

'We'll have a new Dermot in no time at all,' she said. 'You won't recognize him.'

My mum looked quite pleased about that.

DONUT COUNT:



Wednesday 6 September

So this is why I'm writing this diary, wasting precious time in the last few days of the summer holiday. Most definitely *not* my idea of fun.

Everyone knows that diaries are mainly for girls. My sister Ruby had one once. I found it hidden under her mattress, where I was looking for her secret sweet stash. It was full of stuff about her dolls falling in love, and other puke about pop stars she wanted to snog. Or maybe the dolls wanted to snog them, can't remember. It was

one of the sickest documents ever produced by the Human Mind. I thought about throwing it in the bin or taking it to school to show my friends, or encasing it in lead and dropping it in a deep ocean to protect mankind, but in the end I decided just to stick a couple of the pages together with a bogey. I remember it was one of those ones that are in the shape of Japan, and are quite crusty at one end but still moist and juicy at the other, and they are always the best ones for sticking stuff together. She never noticed – or at least she never blamed me for it. She probably just thought it was one of her own that had fallen out.*

* I should probably add that now I'm twelve I don't stick stuff together with bogeys any more. Usually. I suppose it's one of those signs of growing up, like suddenly being embarrassed about the jumpers with pictures on them that your parents buy you for Christmas.

Actually, although diaries are mainly for girls, I quite like writing stories. It's the thing I'm famous for at school. When Miss Bean said, 'I'd like you to write a story about . . .' most of the kids would groan and complain, but I used to love it.*

So I suppose I could just look on this as a chance to write stories, except true and not completely made up, like the one I did about getting abducted by aliens who took me to their planet and made me their king and worshipped me as a god, until they realized that I didn't have any special powers and then they tried to kill me, but I defeated them all because human farts were deadly poisonous to them.

Anyway, I spent today hanging out with Jim, my best friend. I've known him since we were

* Well, actually I'd complain and moan too, but just for show.

at nursery together. He's about as normal as a kid could be, except he likes to eat ear wax.

We were sitting on the platform at the top of the climbing frame in the park. We'd kicked a couple of eight-year-olds off, and we had about half an hour before the teenagers came along and kicked us off. That probably carries on until at the end of the day you have a bunch of tough pensioners sitting up there, smoking and drinking alco-pops and jabbering at people passing by.

I'd picked up three donuts from the bakery, one for Jim and two for me, but Jim wasn't hungry so I ate his for him, otherwise it would have been wasted. Everyone knows that you shouldn't waste food because of global warming and the starving children in Africa and all that.

'Sorry you're not coming to Seabrook with us,' said Jim.

'Me too,' I said, although it sounded more like 'mufftuff' because my mouth was full of donut.

Jim was going to Seabrook High, along with nearly everyone else from my junior school. I was going to St Michael's. St Michael's is quite posh, and you're supposed to be brainy to get in. If I'd known I was going to pass the exam then I'd have tried to fail it. It was only because I thought I didn't have a hope in hell that I tried to pass, if you get what I mean.

Mum really wanted me to go there because she's quite snooty, and also she thought there was less chance of me being bullied because of my weight. She didn't understand that the way you avoid being bullied is by being surrounded by your mates, who have all got used to you being a porker.

I think Jim knew that I was a bit worried about the whole thing.

'You'll be all right,' he said. But he wasn't looking me in the eye. Instead he was looking across the park at the houses, even though there was nothing interesting there, apart from a dog having a very long wee. 'But, er, maybe you could think about possibly, sort of, I don't know, getting a bit, you know, thinner.'

Jim had never said anything like that to me before. And suddenly I found that I was telling him about Doc Morlock. I hadn't meant to, because of the massive embarrassment factor, but it just came out.

I thought Jim would join me in making fun of the nasty old cat-bum-mouth, and he did, a bit. But then he said, 'Yeah, but maybe she's right. Maybe you should, you know, eat less donuts.'

I did know, sorta. But I was still a bit annoyed at Jim for saying it. So I said, 'Fewer.' Then he said, 'What?'

'It's *fewer*. If you've got loads of something, you don't say "less", you say "fewer". You'd only say "less" if there was, like, a massive donut, say as big as a tractor tyre. Then you could eat less of it.'

Even as I was saying it I realized that I was being a jerk, and I wished it right back in my mouth. Jim isn't as good at school stuff as me, but he's not an idiot or anything. Because I felt bad I said, 'OK, maybe you've got a point.'

And to show that I meant it, instead of licking all the donut crumbs off from around my mouth and eating them, I wiped them off with my jumper sleeve and then shook them over the

edge of the climbing frame, so I wouldn't be tempted to try to suck them up from my jumper later. Anyway, it made Jim laugh, and we were friends again.

DONUT COUNT:

