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Mary And Max

By Adam Elliot

Mary Dinkle's eyes were the colour
of muddy puddles.
Her birthmark, the colour of poo.
(Dogs bark)
It was Saturday afternoon
and she was bored.
Mary wished she had a friend
to play piggybacks with.
Mary's mood ring, which she'd found
in a cereal box, was grey
which, according to the chart,
meant she was either pensive,
unconsciously ambitious or hungry.
Her only friends were 'The Noblets'
from her favourite cartoon.
They weren't the real ones
you bought in the shops
but fake ones she had to make herself
from shells, gumnuts, pompoms
and the chicken bones salvaged
from Friday night's takeaway.
She had to make all her own toys,
and her favourites were Shrinkies
potato chip packets that
she had shrunk in the oven.
Mary's father, Noel Norman Dinkle,
worked in a factory,
attaching the strings to tea bags.
At show and tell, she told the class
he could get as many free tea bags
as he wanted.
Her favourite tea bag was Earl Grey.
She loved saying "Earl Grey"
and would like one day to marry
someone called Earl Grey.
They would live
in a castle in Scotland,
have 9 babies, 2 ducks...
..and a dog called Kevin.
Noel's hobby was to sit in his shed
and drink Baileys Irish Cream
and stuff birds he'd found
on the side of the freeway.
Mary wished he'd spend more time

with her and less with his dead friends.
She also wished she had
some brothers and sisters.
Her mother had told her
she was "an accident".
How could someone be an accident?
Grandpoppy Ralph had told her
that babies were deliberate
and found by dads
at the bottom of their beer.
Grandpoppy Ralph
had smelt like pickled onions
and had been a member of the Frankston
Ice Breakers for 51 years.
Aaagh! Aaaaaghhh!
They swam in winter to feel alive.
Grandpoppy Ralph had said
it made his nipples erect.
He had died the year before, aged 74,
and his best mate, Ken,
had recited a poem in his honour.
Born in a barn
in the hills of Boronia,
Ralph lived a long life,
then died of pneumonia.
Mary missed him
and often wondered
why he had drunk ammonia.
A lot of things puzzled Mary
especially her mother,
Vera Lorraine Dinkle.
To Mary, Vera always seemed wobbly.
A pretty vicious ball.
And he's out!
Vera liked listening
to the cricket while baking
and her main ingredient
was always sherry.
She told Mary it was a type of tea
for grown-ups
that needed constant testing.
Just out of the reach
of the lead. 6/96 England.
Mary thought her mother tested

the sherry...way too much.
Mary also couldn't understand
why Vera was always "borrowing".
Yesterday, she borrowed
some fish fingers from Aisle 6.
She told Mary she put things
up her dress to save on plastic bags.
Vera was indeed a complicated soul.
Oooh!
Mary stopped daydreaming
and went and fetched
her pet rooster from the rain.
Her father had found the rooster
on the side of the freeway
after it had fallen off the back
of a slaughter truck.
She named him Ethel.
It was time to watch "The Noblets".
She adored "The Noblets"
because everyone was brown,
lived in a teapot
and had oodles of friends.
There was nothing nicer,
Mary thought to herself,
than the smell of a wet rooster...
..the sound of rain on the roof
and the taste of sweetened
condensed milk straight from the can
while watching your favourite cartoon.
Meanwhile, a man called Max Horowitz
also watched "The Noblets".
Max's small television
had picture but no sound.
His big television, sound but no picture.
He was 44 and liked "The Noblets"
as they lived in a delineated
and articulated social structure
with constant adherent conformity
and also because they had
oodles of friends.
Max had trouble sleeping
and had spent the night watching
television and catching fish food.
He noted to himself it was the sixth fly

he'd caught this evening.
He wondered if he should go to bed
and count sheep
or have one more chocolate hotdog.
He thought he'd try both
but it didn't work.
It had been 6 hours and 12 minutes since
Henry VIII had passed away.
And Henry's death
had thrown Max's life into disarray.
It had become asymmetrical
and the sooner
he got a new fish, the better.
Tomorrow he would go to the pet store
and get another Henry
Henry IX.

Next.

It was shopping day
and Mary sat patiently while her mother
"borrowed" some envelopes.
To fill in time, she scanned the room
and counted how many things
were brown.

There was sticky tape, rubber bands
and a phone book with a picture
of a lady standing in a brown lake
with her hand on fire.

People had weird names in America,
Mary Daisy Dinkle thought to herself.

Funny-sounding people called
Rockefeller and Finkelstein.

She wondered what they looked like,
how old they were
and if they were married, wore glasses,
or had found babies in their beer.

Maybe in the USA
they found babies elsewhere.

Hmm...

They drank a lot of cola.

Maybe they found them in cans.

But, no, they wouldn't fit
through the hole.

Mary had an idea.

She would write to one of the Americans

and ask where babies came from.
She chose a Mr M Horowitz.
Aarrgh, Mrs Dinkle!
Come back here, Vera Dinkle!
You come back here!
Aaargh!!!
Dear Mr M Horowitz,
my name is Mary Daisy Dinkle
and I am 8 years old,
My favourite colour is brown
and my favourite food
is sweetened condensed milk
followed closely by chocolate.
I have a rooster called Ethel
that looks like this.
He doesn't lay eggs but will one day.
My mother likes smoking,
cricket and sherry
and my father likes playing in his shed
with dead birds.
Where do babies come from
in America?
Do they come from cola cans?
In Australia
they are found in beer glasses.
Here is a drawing of me.
I can't draw ears proper
but I'm good at teeth.
It would be great if you could write back
and be my friend.
Yours "sincerealy", Mary Daisy Dinkle.
PS. I hope you like the chocolate bar
I'm also sending.
It's called a Cherry Ripe.
Goodbye, letter. Don't forget to write.
Max hated Thursdays
the day of his weekly
Overeaters Anonymous meeting.
And tonight he'd felt
especially unsettled
because he'd eaten two chocolate
hotdogs on his way there.
OK, class...
Eating chocolate was breaking the rules.

He'd found the night
even more unbearable
because of Marjorie Butterworth's
strange glances.

Class dismissed.

Max had trouble understanding
non-verbal signals.

Flirting was as foreign to him
as jogging.

Max found most people very confusing.

But little did Max realise
his night was about to become
even more confusing and cryptic.

Hmm.

He read Mary's letter four times
and then did what he normally did
whenever confronted
with something new and stressful.

Max's fragile existence
had once again become unsettled.
And after staring out of the window
for 18 hours
he finally made a decision.

Dear Mary Daisy Dinkle,
thank you for the letter,
which I opened and read at 9.1 7pm
after my Overeaters Anonymous class.

I am trying to lose weight
because my psychiatrist,
Dr Bernard Hazelhof,
says a healthy body
equals a healthy mind.

Ooooh!

He says my mind is not that healthy.
Your drawing is an interesting
visual portrayal of yourself.
I have never met anyone from Australia.
Firstly, I will answer your question.
Unfortunately, in America,
babies are not found in cola cans.
I asked my mother when I was four
and she said they came from eggs
laid by rabbis.

If you aren't Jewish,

they're laid by Catholic nuns.
If you're an atheist,
they're laid by dirty, lonely prostitutes.
So this is where babies come from
in America.

I share my home with a fish,
some snails, whom I have named
after famous scientists...

..a parakeet called Mr Biscuit
and, finally, a cat called Hal.

"Hal" is an abbreviation for halitosis,
from which he suffers.

He followed me home
after a gang of children
shot his eye out with a beebie gun.

Do you have a pet kangaroo?

When I was born, my father
left my mother and me on a kibbutz.
She shot herself with my uncle's gun
when I was six.

Do you like chocolate hotdogs?

I invented the recipe for them
and can send it to you.

When I was young, I invented
an invisible friend called Mr Ravioli.

My psychiatrist says
I don't need him anymore
so he just sits in the corner and reads.

Last week I picked up
People are always littering in New York.

I do not understand
why people break laws.

Butts are bad
because they wash out to sea
and fish smoke them
and become nicotine dependent.

I am just joking because, of course,
it is impossible for a cigarette
to remain lit underwater.

Also, fish do not have pockets
to keep cigarette lighters in.

I am 44 years old
and have 8 tracksuits
the same colour and size.

I weigh 352 lb...

Ooooh!

..and am as tall as a 6-foot tree.

Welcome to the New York Lottery!

I enjoy entering the lottery
and have chosen the same numbers
for 9 years.

Those numbers are 3...

(7.

And 12.

Are you a winner?

Or a loser?

I have had many different jobs
during my life.

My first job was collecting
subway tokens in the subway.

My second job was at Yiddel's
Gourmet Kosher Supplies
where I worked at the machine that made
pre-packaged noodle kugels.

I was born Jewish
and used to believe in God
but I've since read many books
that have proven God
is just a figment of my imagination.
People like to believe in God because
it answers complicated questions
Iike where did the universe come from,
do worms go to heaven...
do worms go to heaven...

..and why do old ladies have blue hair?

Even though I'm an atheist,
I still wear my yarmulke
as it keeps my brain warm.

My third job was for a company
that printed logos on novelty items.
I worked at the frisbee printing machine.
A frisbee is a circular plastic disc
that people throw at each other.

It is like a boomerang
but it does not come back.

My fourth job was when
I was called up for jury duty.
I didn't get paid much

but got free cookies and coffee.
Jurors are outstanding members
of the community
who haven't murdered anybody.
I made it to the short list
for a trial where a man
killed all his friends
at his own surprise birthday party.
Unfortunately, I didn't get selected
because they found out
I'd been a mental patient at one point.
Have you ever been hang gliding?
My fifth job was as a garbage collector.
I got to clean up after litterbugs
and didn't have to talk to anybody.
Sometimes I used to pretend
I was an intergalactical robot.
This is 911.
Your call has been placed in a queue.
One time the police took me in
for questioning
but let me go when they decided
I wasn't a threat to anybody
except myself.
The sixth job I had
was for the United States Army
in the stationery supply department.
Because I am good with numbers
I had to work out how many
ballpoint pens the Army needed.
One day they did a security check
and asked whether I was a member
of any radical groups.
I told them I was a member of
the New York Science Fiction Fan Club.
They said this didn't count
but dismissed me anyway.
Fortunately, I did not remember
to tell them I was once a communist.
Have you ever been a communist?
Have you ever been attacked by a crow
or similar large bird?
When I was 9, a crow attacked me
on my way to school.

I had to have three stitches
and in spring I now wear a helmet
with eyes I have painted on.
People laugh at me
when I wear my helmet.
I'm not sure why.
People often confuse me
but I try not to let them worry me.
New York is a very busy
and noisy place.
I would prefer to live
somewhere much quieter
like the moon.
I don't like crowds, bright lights,
sudden noises or strong smells.
New York has all these
especially the smells.
I often wear nose and ear plugs
when I go outside.
It helps keep me calm.
I find humans interesting but I have
trouble understanding them.
I think, however,
I will understand and trust you.
You appear very happy and I think
you would smell like a shrimp
as I know Australia
has a lot of shrimps.
Can you speed-read?
I have taught myself to read
two pages at once
one eyeball per page.
I have to go now
even though I have not told you
about my 7th job,
in a condom factory.
Write back soon.
Your American friend,
Max Jerry Horowitz.
PS. Please find enclosed
a photo from one of those booths.
PPS. Thank you for the Cherry Ripe
and I am glad you like chocolate
as much as I do.

I have never eaten
sweetened condensed milk
but I will try some this week.
PPPS. I have never used a condom.
Gey gezunterheyt.
Max hoped
Mary would write again.
He'd always wanted a friend.
A friend that wasn't invisible,
a pet or rubber figurine.
He counted the stars and wondered
how many days, hours, minutes
it would take his letter
to reach Australia.
Vera was not impressed...
Aaaarrgh!
..not impressed at all.
This nutcase would not be her daughter's
penfriend, she thought.
There was enough ugliness in the world.
Mary would be home from school
in an hour
enough time for another cup of tea
and a bit of cricket to soothe the nerves
and dissolve the memory of Max's letter
from her pickled mind.
Yeah, he's out.
Unbelievable. 14. England 7/150.
Stop! Wait!
Hey, fellas, you got room
for one more bag?
Sure, Mrs Dinkle. Hop in!
Good one, Kevin!
Aaaarghhh!
Come on, Vera.
We've got some other bags to pick up!
Ooh. Hmm.
Mary, is that all the rubbish?
Yep!
See ya, Toots!
Sweet baby Jesus.
Ooooah!
Even though Max's letter smelt
like fish heads and orange peel,

Mary drank his words
like a bowl of alphabet soup
and hadn't been this excited
since Grandpoppy Ralph
had found a coin up her nose.
She wrote back immediately
on some butchers' paper
she'd stolen from some chops.
Dear Max,
I'm so excited you've wroted back.
I don't think my parents like you
so from now on
send stuff to my neighbour Len Hislop
at 26 Lamington Drive,
Mt Waverley.
He's old with no legs.
They got chew"d"ed off
in World War 11
when some Japanese peoples
kept him in a cage above piranhas.
Piranhas are goldfish that have teeth.
He's scared of outside,
which is a disease called homophobia.
He's started giving me 50 cents a week
to get his mail.
I'm saving to buy a castle in Scotland
and marry a man called Earl Grey.
Do you get "The Noblets" in America?
Well, my favourite Noblet
is Vanity Noblet.
He wants to be everyone's friend,
even the boys'!
In your letter, you said
you had no friends.
Well, neither do I.
A-ha!
Yesterday at school, Bernie Clifford weed
on my spam sandwich
and called me "poo face"
'cos of my birthmark.
I wish I could peel it off like a bandaid.
He also laughed
'cos I had no buttons.
Ethel pecked them off

and Mum couldn't thread a needle
'cos she'd been testing the sherry
so she used pegs instead.
When I got home, I climbed into
my secret place till dinner time.
The other kids also laugh at my haircut.
Dad has to cut my hair
because mum says
real hairdressers
sell your hair to Chinamen
who stuff mattresses.
My teacher, Mrs Pendergast,
says I should smile more.
I told my mum
and so she drew a big smile on me.
I don't think Mrs Pendergast
likes me anymore.
I better go now.
My tears are smudging my words.
Your friend in Australia,
Mary Daisy Dinkle.
PS. Have you ever been teased?
Can you help me?
PSS. I've never been hang gliding
before or been a "commune-ist"
but would love a frisbee
and your recipe for chocolate hotdogs.
PSSS. I'm sending you some
Australian chocolate, a pompom I made
and a cake called a lamington,
which I was meant to eat for lunch.
Have you ever been teased?
Ooooooooooaaaahhhh!
Mary's letter
triggered memories
Max had buried deep down in his shoes.
We've got him cornered now.
Hey, Jew-boy, you're gonna pay...
Take this, Jew-boy, Jew-boy, Jew-boy.
And as usual,
he coped in the only way he knew.
And 36 chocolate hotdogs later...
..and after only two hours sleep,
Max's meltdown faded away

and an idea popped into his brain.
Dear Mary Daisy Dinkle,
thank you for your letter, chocolate bar,
lamington and pompom.
The chocolate got crushed, so I blended
the bits with milk and icecream
and now I am drinking it right now.
After much thought, I think I have
a solution to your teasing.
Tell Bernie Clifford
your birthmark is made of chocolate,
which means when you get to heaven
you will be in charge
of all the chocolate.
This of course is a lie
I do not like lies
but in this case
I think it will be of benefit.
I wish I could be in charge
of all the chocolate
but, of course, I cannot
because of my atheism.
My neighbour lvy is also an atheist.
She doesn't talk much but makes me
very good soup on Sunday nights.
She is partly blind
and sometimes I find her hair
in my soup. Eeugh!
I do not tell her as Dr Bernard Hazelhof
says this would be impolite.
Here is a list of what I eat
on the other nights.
Mondays - Glicks Potato Knish,
Tuesdays - Yiddels Noodle Kugel,
Wednesdays -
Captain Salty's Fishstix,
Thursdays - Yentls Cheezy Blintz
and Fridays - chicken nuggets.
On Saturday nights
I create my own recipes.
Last week I invented
canned spaghetti hamburgers.
Recipes are like
mathematical equations.

Dr Bernard Hazelhof told me you should
never weigh more than your refrigerator
and to never eat
anything bigger than your head.
I once ate a watermelon
bigger than my head
but not all at once.
Do you have
any weight loss suggestions?
My Overeaters Anonymous meetings
don't seem to be working
and just make me tense.
It would be good
if there was a "Fat Fairy".
She would be a bit like the Tooth Fairy
but would suck out your fat.
Ivy says she is only a "little bit" blind
but I think she is very blind.
She should get a cane
like other vision-impaired people.
She could make the end pointy
and collect rubbish at the same time.
I think I will write a letter to the Mayor
and suggest this.
He will be very impressed.
Ivy says she doesn't need a cane
because she has a good sense of smell.
She says she could find me
with her eyes stapled shut.
She says I smell like liquorice
and old books.
I think she smells like cough medicine
and urine.
I have never told her this
as Dr Bernard Hazelhof said
this would also be impolite.
People often think
I am tactless and rude.
I cannot understand how
being honest can be...improper.
Maybe this is why
I don't have any friends
of course except for you.
A real friend has been

one of my three goals in life.
The other two are to own every Noblet
and a lifetime supply of chocolate.
Dr Bernard Hazelhof says
it is good to have goals
but not stupid ones like mine.
I have now run out of things to tell you.
Please, write soon.
Your friend in America,
Max Jerry Horowitz.

PS. Do not worry about not smiling.
My mouth hardly ever smiles
but it does not mean
I am not smiling inside my brain.
PPS. Please find enclosed a frisbee,
some Chocolate Pop Rocks,
which you should eat with cola,
and an illustration of a turtle
from one of my National Geographics.
PPPS. Did you know that turtles
can breathe through their anuses?

Dear Max,
when I told Bernie Clifford
I'll be in charge of all the chocolate
in heaven and he wouldn't get any,
he cried.
I also hide'd some dog's poo
in his bit of the sandpit.
Your advice was great and
I've got a job delivering pamphlets
so I can save to come and see you.
I am sad to hear you are fat.
Mum says I am fat too
and I'm growing up to be a heifer,
which I think is a type of cow.
Maybe you should only eat things
beginning with the letter of each day.
On Mondays you could only eat
milkshakes, marshmallows
and...mustard.
Oooh!
For my birthday, my Mum baked a cake
and Dad gave me a camera.
I hope you like the photos I sent.

The first one is of Ethel,
who ate some tinsel.
The next one is one of myself
after I ate the Chocolate Pop Rocks
with the cola, like you said.
Next is Len.
He's still trying hard not to be afraid of
outside and conquer his homophobia.
The next one is of dad in his shed,
and then one of the times
I covered mum
while she was asleep in her stickers
that help her stop smoking.
Next, when I got my slinky
caught in my hair.
Then one of the times Sonny
dug up his wife, Cher.
And, finally, a photo of my other
neighbour Damian Popodopolous.
He's a Greek and smells like
lemon dishwashing liquid
and his skin is smooth,
like the back of a spoon.
Mum says he's a wog and has a stutter
and can't even say his own surname.
She says you have to hit him
on the back of the head
to get his words out.
P-P-P-P...Popodopolous.
I wish he was my boyfriend
and we can be in love and do sexing
like Katherine Ramsay told me
behind the bike shed.
She said it's when two people
go "nuddy"
and rub on each other to make babies.
I told her she's a liar
and would go to hell and burn like toast
'cos babies really come
from beer glasses
and eggs laid by rabbits
and nuns and "prosti-tubes".
She said ladies get knocked up
and bake babies in their stomachs

for 2 years
till they spurt out their "vag-eye-ners"
with blood and tinned spaghetti.
Have you got a girlfriend, Max,
or some wives?
Have you done sexing?
Valentine's Day is soon
and I want to give Damian a present
so he can love me.
Can you explain love
and how I can be "lover'd"?
Once again, Mary's letter
had triggered an anxiety attack.
Max knew nothing about love.
It was as foreign to him as scuba diving
and he'd had an appalling history
of getting it all wrong.
One Valentine's Day
he'd given Zelda Glutnik a gift
he was sure was appropriate.
The only companion
that had ever warmed Max's bed
was his hot water bottle.
Romance and love
was a mysterious language
he'd given up on.
If only Mary had asked
how a toaster works
or asked for an explanation
of the Chaos theory.
If only there was
a mathematical equation for love.
He kept eating and thinking.
But love was not like Max's
Rubik's Cube. It could not be solved.
No matter how he analysed it,
the results were negative.
Beat it, creep!
He felt love but couldn't articulate it.
Its logic was as foreign to him as...
as a salad sandwich.
The stars made more sense.
to the call? Over.
The anxiety and stress were too much.

The inscrutability of love finally won,
and Max's brain gave in.
He was diagnosed
with severe depression and obesity
and spent the next 8 months
institutionalised and bedridden.
They marinated him
in a cocktail of drugs
and performed
the usual "therapeutic" procedures.
Meanwhile, Mary wondered and waited.
Maybe Max's typewriter
had run out of ink.
Maybe America had run out of ink.
Maybe his pets had eaten him.
Maybe it was her.
Was she too demanding,
too boring, too...ugly?
Filled with anger, confusion
and self-loathing,
Mary tried to erase
the memory of her friend forever.
Max had recovered.
And life was balanced, safe
and symmetrical once again.
But Mary still lingered in his mind.
Half of him wanted to write to her
immediately.
The other half didn't want to end up
a mental patient again.
At least there was always Mr Ravioli
to be friends with.
He was a much safer option.
He wondered what Mary was doing
right now.
But she was far from content
and struggled on by herself,
saving her money for a rainy day.
Life went on as usual for Max
and even though he opted
for order and stability,
misfortune was never far away.
Luckily, his manslaughter charges
were dismissed

because he was labelled
mentally deficient
and unlikely to have a motive
for killing a mime artist...

Oop.

..unlike most people.

From then on,

Max cooled himself differently
and things went back to normal
until after his 48th birthday,
when his numbers finally came up.

Welcome

to the New York Lottery
and these are tonight's
winning numbers

Max was sensible
with his sudden wealth
and had bought a lifetime supply
of chocolate
and the complete Noblet collection.
Two of his life goals had come true.

But he still had a lot of money
so decided to give it to lvy...

..who was also very sensible...

..until her own numbers came up.

Ivy willed everything
to the local cat shelter,
whose owner relocated
her kind donation to his bank account,
his wife's new breasts, a Ferrari
and enough fuel to get to Mexico.

Despite achieving all his life's goals,
Max still felt incomplete.

Mr Ravioli just wasn't
cutting the mustard anymore
and seemed more interested
in his self-help books.

Mary had given Max
a taste of real friendship
and there was just no comparison.

She missed him too

but no longer saved to see him.

She now saved

for a different reason.

One day Mr Ravioli got up,
left and never came back.
Max sought Dr Hazelhof's advice.
He told Max that true friendship
is seen through the heart,
not through the eyes,
and that it was time he wrote to Mary
to reveal his true self, warts and all.
Max understood.

Dear Mary Daisy Dinkle,
there is something I have to tell you
which will explain
why I have not written.
Each time I received one of your letters,
I had a severe anxiety attack.

This is because recently,
while I was in a mental institution,
they diagnosed that I have a new thing
called Asperger's syndrome,
which is a neurobiological,
pervasive, developmental disability.

I prefer "Aspie" for short.
I will now list some of the traits
of an Aspie.

No.1 - I find the world
very confusing and chaotic
because my mind
is very literal and logical.
the expressions on people's faces.
When I was younger, I made a book
to help me when I was confused.
I still have trouble with some people.
Ivy was hard to understand
because of her wrinkles
and because her eyebrows weren't real.
am hypersensitive...

..clumsy
and can get very concerned.
Ivy said this is a good thing.
And finally No.5 -
I have trouble expressing my emotions.
Dr Bernard Hazelhof says
my brain is defective
but one day there will be a cure

for my disability.
I do not like it when he says this.
I do not feel disabled, defective
or I need to be cured.
I like being an Aspie.
It would be like trying to change
the colour of my eyes.
There is one thing
I wish I could change, however.
I wish I could cry properly.
I squeeze and squeeze
but nothing...comes out.
I cry when I cut onions
but this does not count.
Anyway, do you like the word
"cumquat"?
It is a type of fruit.
Do you have
a favourite-sounding word?
My top 5 are ointment, bumblebee,
Vladivostok, banana
and testicle.
I have also invented some new words
"confuzzled", which is being confused
and puzzled at the same time,
"snirt", which is a cross between
snow and dirt,
and "smushables"...
..which are squashed groceries
you find at the bottom of the bag.
I have sent a letter
to the Oxford Dictionary people
asking them to include my words
but I have not heard back.
It is now time for me to go
to my Overeaters Anonymous meeting.
There is a woman there
called Marjorie Buttersworth
who confuzzles me.
She kisses me without my permission
so tonight I have decided to rub onions
under my armpits to repel her.
Your friend in America,
Max Jerry Horowitz.

PS. Please find enclosed
some chocolate-covered ants
I found at the deli.
PPS. Not much has happened
since I last wrote
except for my manslaughter charges,
lotto win and lvy's death.
Mary was thrilled
Max had finally written
and suddenly had a fabulous idea.
A-ha!
Mary and Max's friendship
was resuscitated
and her tears were the best gift
he'd ever received.
Inside Max's head
his brain was smiling.
Loaded up with bizarre forms
of chocolate,
their letters flew thick and fast
between the continents.
Max learnt to read Mary's letters
with caution
and at the slightest tingle of tension,
he would stop,
take his medication
and soothe his nerves.
Each letter he would iron, laminate
and file in a special place,
which also soothed his nerves.
He enjoyed answering her questions
and solving her puzzles like
Do sheep shrink when it rains?
Why do old men
wear their pants so high?
Do geese get goosebumps
and why is bellybutton lint blue?
Are there Noblets in heaven?
And if a taxi goes backwards,
does the driver owe you money?
In turn, Mary simply enjoyed
hearing about Max's fascinating life
how many people
he'd counted littering...

..how the latest Henry had died...
..and new recipes he'd invented
for chicken.
Each nourished the other
and, as Mary grew taller,
Max grew wider
their friendship becoming stronger
than the glue on Mary's Noblets.
Although Max found solace in Mary,
he still found the rest of the world
bewildering.
And he couldn't understand
why he was seen as the odd one
while everyone else
was considered normal.
Humans were endlessly illogical.
Why did they throw out food when
there were children starving in India?
Why did they clear the rainforests
when they needed the oxygen?
And why did they create bus timetables
when they never ran on time?
He agreed with his favourite physicist
that there are only two things infinite
the universe and man's stupidity.
And for Mary, even though
Max filled her with confidence...
Bullseye!
..her world was far from perfect.
The grip of love had her by the throat.
At 4.59pm, on the 8th of the 8th 1988...
..Noel Norman Dinkle
attached his last string
and, after 40 years
and 40 million tea bags, he retired.
To celebrate, Noel announced
he was retiring from taxidermy
and taking up metal detecting instead.
But, sadly, it was not a hobby
he had for long.
In his will, Noel had left Mary
some money
so she decided to go to university
and study disorders of the mind,

yearning to learn more about her friend.

Mary was as popular at university
as she was at school.

Damian went there too,
aching to be a Thespian.

Hi there, M-M-Mary.

Hi...hello!

That was damn f-f-funny!

Hey, Damian,
your mum's roses look fab!

Oh, th-th-th-thanks, Mary.

Um, M-Mary,
can I tell you something?

Sure, babe!

Um, um, you've got d-d-d-d-dog's poo
on your shoe.

Dear Max,

I have been such an idiot.
I've wasted all my money
on something pointless
when I should have been saving
to see you.

I know love upsets you
so I won't go on about it.
All I want to say is that love
is obviously not for me.
I hope you are well and enjoy
the chocolate cigarettes I've enclosed.
Love Mary.

Oh, you should be ashamed!

- Come on, baby. Let's go.

- Oh, Mum...

I told you never to talk to strangers.
Noel's sudden death
had filled Vera with remorse and guilt
and she coped
in the only way she knew.

Dear Max,

our wedding day was everything
I have ever dreamt,
making up for the terrible year I've had.
Although all the guests
were Damian's family and friends,
I felt very welcome.

Damian is so perfect.
He even made my wedding dress.
And for our honeymoon
he took me to Mykonos
his favourite island in Greece.
I got to ride a donkey
and found the perfect gift for Len.
Poor Len, he's still struggling
with his agoraphobia.
Aaaaahhhh!
Damian and I are so similar.
He even has his own penfriend, who lives
on a sheep farm in New Zealand.
Mary...M-M-M-Mary.
Mary...M-M-M-Mary.
Ohhh.
Mary was bursting with self-esteem
and her confidence
was almost unbearable.
At university, she shone
and took it upon herself
to cure the world of mental illness.
She did her thesis
on Asperger's syndrome
and used Max as her case study.
Her professors
were thoroughly impressed
and her writing praised far and wide.
Soon, publishers queued
to print her unique insight
and by her 25th birthday, thousands
of copies were ready to be shipped.
Dear Max,
I am very proud to give you
the very first copy of my book
about your disability
and the hopes that we have
to one day cure it.
Even more exciting
is that I am finally coming to meet and
celebrate with you in one week's time.
I'm also going to give you
half the royalties.
Your loving friend, Mary.

PS. Please find enclosed
some chocolate-coated Swiss almonds.
Max didn't take the news
very well
not very well at all.
Dear Mary Daisy Dinkle,
I cannot express myself
very clearly at this moment
and so I will list my emotions
in the order they feel most intense
hurt, confuzzledness, betrayal,
discomfort, distress and wheeziness.
This last one is not really an emotion
but I thought you should know about it
anyway.
With her suitcase packed for New York,
Mary said goodbye to Damian.
She hadn't been this excited since
she'd found a Noblet in the gutter.
But her excitement
suddenly dribbled away
Like a chocolate in the sun.
Mary slowly sank
into a puddle of depression, self-loathing
and cooking sherry.
The only colour left in her life
was her beloved Damian,
only an arm's length away
but as distant as the moon.
She lost interest in the world
and it lost interest in her
as a horrible apparition began to haunt.
She started to spend her nights
making pompoms
and eating two-minute noodles.
Each day, with strength and shame,
Mary trudged to the letterbox in hope,
only to swivel, shrivel
and slink back inside.
My dearest Mary,
by the time you read this,
I will be on a plane to New Zealand
to begin a new life.
You probably haven 't even noticed

I'd packed my bags.
I have fallen in love
with my penfriend, Desmond,
and I'm going to live
on his sheep farm.
It's been hard to watch you become
a remnant of the person I once loved.
Your research into m-m-mental illness
has been admirable
but your i-idealistic pursuit to remedy it
has been misguided.
Mary, you have to realise y-you are not
a magic beauty cream
you can smooth on the world
to rid it of its wrinkles.
I love you, Mary,
but I love Desmond more.
I hope one day your heart will heal
and we can be friends.
Yours compassionately,
Damian.

Aaaarghh!

Dear Mayor Ridiculani,
on Monday I counted 27 people
illegally dropping cigarette butts.
I would like to recommend
the fine be increased
to a minimum of \$1 million
as a stronger deterrent
and would be happy...

Thank you.

Sorry.

Dear Mary,
please find enclosed
my entire Noblet collection
as a sign that I forgive you.
When I received your book,
the emotions inside...
On the way home,
Max sat to count the stars.
He felt complete
the world was back in balance.
When I was just a little girl
I asked my mother, what will I be?

Will I be pretty, will I be rich?
Here's what she said to me...
Que sera sera
Whatever will be will be
The future's not ours to see
Que sera sera
Que sera sera
Whatever will be will be
The future's not ours to see
Que sera sera
What will be will be
Que sera sera

Ah!

Len had saved the day
and after 45 years
he finally conquered his agoraphobia.

Moron!

Dear Mary,
please find enclosed
my entire Noblet collection
as a sign that I forgive you.
When I received your book,
the emotions inside my brain
felt like they were in a tumble dryer,
smashing into each other.
The hurt felt like when I accidentally
stapled my lips together.

Ow!

The reason I forgive you
is because you are not perfect.
You are imperfect, and so am I.
All humans are imperfect,
even the man outside my apartment
who litters.

When I was young,
I wanted to be anybody but myself.
Dr Bernard Hazelhof said
if I was on a desert island
then I would have to get used
to my own company
just me and the coconuts.
He said I would have to accept myself,
my warts and all,
and that we don't get to choose

our warts.

They are a part of us
and we have to live with them.

We can, however, choose our friends
and I am glad I have chosen you.

Dr Bernard Hazelhof also said
that everyone's lives
are like a very long sidewalk.

Some are well paved.

Others, like mine,
have cracks, banana skins
and cigarette butts.

Your sidewalk is like mine
but probably not as many cracks.

Hopefully, one day
our sidewalks will meet
and we can share
a can of condensed milk.

You are my best friend.

You are my only friend.

Your American penpal,
Max Jerry Horowitz.

PS. I have recently found the perfect job
with a survey company.

All I have to do is eat things
and tick boxes.

Max?

Max?

Max?

Hello?

Max, it's us!

We're here!

Oh, Max?

Max had died peacefully
that morning
after finishing his final can
of condensed milk.

You are my best friend.

You are my only friend.

He smelt like liquorice
and old books, she thought to herself,
as tears rolled from her eyes
the colour of muddy puddles.