



Sarah Russell

Saturday

Lotti woke up to another confusing text from Mary.

“I’ve told Paul how I feel about you. He’s comfortable with me having a relationship with you. He said he would never stop me doing anything.”

“Your boyfriend has given you permission to have an affair with me. You’re joking?”

“Lotti! You’ve got it all wrong.”

“I am not interested in a love triangle. But I have space on my dance card for another friend.”

“So I can’t explain myself? Paul just wants me to be happy.”

“I don’t care what Paul wants. I care what you want. Of course you can explain yourself, but you need to pick up the phone. I’ve phoned 3 times.”

“Paul said I could leave him to be with you. But I just can’t take that step yet. This will be my last text. My dance card is full. I will not be in contact again.”

“Mary, Why are you ignoring my calls? This conversation deserves more than a text.”

Lotti phoned but it went straight to voicemail.

Mary replied with another text.

“Sorry, I’ve just had two long phone calls.”

Lotti left another voicemail. “So those two long phone calls were more important than talking with me? I didn’t want what we had together to end via a text. But unless you answer the phone, it will.”

Mary texted: “Sorry, I can’t talk right now. Paul is here.”

“Maybe you could put me on speaker phone so the three of us could have a chat. I’m going to phone you one last time. If you don’t answer, that’s it. It’s over.”

“Mary, I phoned again. Goodbye.”

The next day

“Hi Lotti, I’m sad because you’re so impatient. Everything has to be done in Lotti time. You said you couldn’t wait for me to leave Paul. And because I can’t leave immediately, you dumped me. I don’t think you gave us a chance. We don’t need to be friends. Cheers.”

“Mary, I didn’t dump you. It was your text that ended it.”

"I just re-read my text. It did read like I've decided to stay with Paul – but it shouldn't have! I'm sorry. Paul gave us a chance to get to know each other better and then to move into an exclusive relationship. But I've missed my chance?"

"Paul 'gave us a chance'. Your texts are ridiculous."

"Let's talk about this when we see each other?"

"Tomorrow?"

Next day

"Good morning, Lotti. My car is being serviced. Otherwise I'd come to see you."

"We need to talk about your proposed love triangle. Why don't you get an Uber?"

"I don't have Uber on my phone. And my phone's playing up. I might have to throw it into the sea!"

"Get a taxi! What would Oscar Wilde say?"

"Oscar Wilde?"

"To lose your car may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both your car and phone looks like carelessness."

"Haha. I'd like to explain the text that upset you. Paul is a lovely guy and he wants me to be happy. He said I could have an affair with you."

"This just goes from bad to worse."

"Lotti, You've said you don't want us to have a relationship while I have a boyfriend. So we will have to be friends until I'm ready to leave Paul."

"So we're back to friends again? Yesterday your dance card was full. You change your mind every text."

"Of course we're friends."

"We need to talk about this."

"This was an opportunity to leave Paul without hurting him too much. I saw it as a get out of jail free card."

"A get out of jail free card! Are you in jail? I hope to see you later today, if your warden lets you out on day leave (smiley face emoji)."

A week later

Lotti phoned Mary. It went to voicemail.

"If our relationship is important, you'll make time to see me."

Later in the day, Mary texted.

"You're so full-on! Can't you see you are putting me under an enormous amount of pressure? I can't leave Paul right now. He loves me. I don't want to hurt him."

"So you don't have time to talk?"

"I don't have time think about this. I'm totally exhausted. I'm working 16-hour days getting the new pet shop ready. I didn't want to open this stupid shop. Paul talked me into it."

"Each text raises another issue. When we finally see each other, we're going to need an agenda to cover all the items on my list."

The next day

Lotti phoned Mary.

"Sorry, I'm driving. I can't talk. The shop opens this afternoon."

When Mary arrived at the shop, she sent Lotti a photo of pancakes.

"Mary. This has gone from the sublime to the ridiculous! We have some serious things to discuss and you're sending me food photos. Please make some time to see me. This has dragged on for too long."

A week later

Lotti phoned Mary.

"Mary, I'm sorry we haven't seen each other to talk about all the things on my list. I reckon we've missed our chance and should call it quits. People make time for things that matter."

"Lotti, I'm so busy with the shop. I don't have time for anything – not even sleep."

"I've booked 2 tickets to see Sally West on 2nd April. If you've left Paul by then, it can be our first date – and I will pay. If you're still with Paul, we can go as friends – and you can pay for yourself. Until then, I'd prefer no contact."

New Years Eve

"Mary, I have a missed call on my phone. WTF?"

"Sorry for the pocket call lovely. I hope you have a great year. I am looking forward to us spending more time together in 2017. ❤️"

A week later

Lotti could not wait any longer. She decided to write a careful email.

“Dear Mary, Your accidental New Year’s Eve pocket call has prompted this email. I don’t want to re-start the back-and-forth texting but I need to say this so I can move on. I’m sorry our relationship went triangular-shaped. Who knows? It may have been different if we had sat down together and talked. But we chose to send all those stupid texts. Do you remember the text when you said Paul made you open the shop? I’ve been worried ever since. How long before you’d say: “Lotti made me do it?” It’s best for me to have no further contact for the time being - no texts, personal messages, tweets or phone calls - not even pocket calls. I hope you agree. Who knows? One day in the future, our paths may cross. I hope so. Ciao”

“Hi Lotti, I didn’t know you were Italian! Paul did a number on me. You did too when you tried to talk me into kissing you! I told you about my lack of attachment with my mother. You said you knew about attachment theory. So you should have known people talk me into doing things I don’t want to do, particularly when I’m vulnerable. There were red flags for me too. So I guess we both dodged a bullet! It’s unlikely our paths will cross. Don’t save the Sally West ticket for me. I won’t be going.”

“La tua risposta conferma che abbiamo schivato un proiettile. I’m very glad I didn’t talk you into kissing me. I think flags, whatever their colour, can be opportunities for people to grow. And this bloody attachment theory. You’re right, I don’t understand why an intelligent, independent woman like you is so vulnerable. You’ve had 45 years to deal with it – yet you’re still blaming your mother for your lack of agency.”

“When Paul said I could have an affair with you, he was being lovely. This was his way of not losing me altogether. Why can’t you understand this?”

“I don’t understand why you now say Paul is lovely. You made him sound like a misogynist prick.”

“It seems I’m just a crap communicator.”

“Your communication was pretty clear when you told me how your boyfriend treats you like shit. Is this the same bloke who dismisses your views? Tells you he doesn’t want a fat girlfriend? Complains about your legs being too white and your hair going grey. Was it you crying on my couch? Or was this your doppelgänger?”

“When couples have issues, they don’t talk about their partner’s good qualities.”

“When you started whinging about your boyfriend, I should have run for the hills. Instead I tried to rescue you.”

“My problem is I’m terrified of leaving Paul. And I’d have trouble in a lesbian relationship.”

“Goodness. I thought you told me you are gay. Perhaps you said “g’day”. My mistake. Now I feel silly for feeling jealous that Paul got the New Year’s Eve snog and not me!”

“Paul is now pestering me about you. He told me normal people don’t confess love so quickly. He says I must have encouraged it. I’m sorry if I led you on. Also, I don’t understand why you think it was weird to talk with you about Paul. I talk with all my friends about him. Yesterday, I cried all day. I wonder if I’ll become dehydrated.”

“Tell Paul normal people confess love when they feel love. Who is the Love Time Keeper who says I did this is too fast? And yes, you led me on. You even told me your son wanted us to be together. Or did I misunderstand that too? I truly believed we would have been great together. Now I don’t know what I believe. I’m sorry you are crying - but there is no fear of dehydration if you drink a glass of water occasionally. To dehydrate to death by crying, you need to cry continuously at the rate of 10 tears per minute for around 9 days.”

“Yes, Lotti, we would be great together. I’d like to talk with you but I’m at the shop by myself.”

“Mary, You are doing my head in. One minute you say you’d have trouble in a lesbian relationship. Next you say we would be a great couple. Can you please make up your mind?”

“I was just saying I didn’t mean to lead you on. I’m sorry if you think I did.”

“Just for future reference – if you meet another single lesbian who fancies you – the following led me on: Telling me how unhappy you are with Paul and that you are leaving him. You told me this on 3 different occasions! But the biggest leading me on was telling me you are gay when it appears you’re not.”

“Everything I told you was true. I want to leave Paul. I want to be with you.”

“You need to stop this roller coaster. Please - for your sake - do what you want. Are you able to talk with me tomorrow?”

Next day

“Hi Lotti, Sorry I didn’t see this email. Yes, let’s talk, next week. Ok?”

“No, Mary, it’s not OK. You have put off seeing me for over a month. I’m not waiting until next week. I’ve just read over all your texts and emails – they are a total brain fuck. I am so tired of your mixed messages. I am also annoyed when you tell me what Paul said. Just to be crystal clear: I could not give a fuck what Paul said. If you want to talk, pick up the phone. If you want to see me, drop in. But please don’t write any more emails saying: “I want to leave Paul”. Do it, don’t do it. I really could not give a fuck anymore.”

“Lotti – You are so superior. We all have a shadow.”

"I am not interested in your Jungian psychobabble? Let's give it a rest."

"Yes, the whole thing was madness. You took advantage of me. I was vulnerable and you were very persuasive. You love bombed me!"

"More psychobabble. Expressing genuine feelings is not love bombing."

"You put so much pressure on me to leave. I'll leave if or when I'm ready. I won't leave Paul for you. I'll leave him for myself."

"I never wanted you to leave Paul for me. I'm not replying to any more emails. We've missed our chance. I've called it quits."

"Oh yes, Lotti. I remember you saying people who don't reply are exerting their power. And come to think of it, I felt bullied."

"I can't resist replying. I'm overwhelmed with all your accusations. I took advantage of you, pressured you, bullied you. What next?"

"I have cognitive dissonance. I have deleted all our correspondence as it was really just madness."

"Mary, I am at my wits' end with your psychobabble. You're not suffering from cognitive dissonance. You are suffering from indecision. You just can't decide if you want to be with Arthur or Martha. Enough now. I wish you peace and happiness. Goodbye Mary."

"Lotti, You're such a cow! I didn't leave Paul because I know the terrible pain that leaving causes. You took advantage of me when I was vulnerable."

"Yes it's all my fault. I'm the oppressor and you are the victim."

"I didn't ask you to sit next to me! A red flag was you telling me you love me after knowing me for only few weeks."

"I did not know sitting beside you required a visa."

"I was vulnerable to your wit and intelligence because I was so unhappy with Paul. I told you the pocket call was a mistake yet you chose to contact me. You need some self control."

"Self control. Ha! Pot calling kettle black. You're reacting like a child. You should try thinking first before you send another nasty email."

"Lotti, Please stop contacting me! I don't have a nasty bone in my body."

"I reckon many farmers would disagree with you. Your tweets to dairy farmers about animal rights are really nasty. You attack the person not the ball."

"Lotti, I have had enough of your self-righteous bull shit."

“We could have avoided this clusterfuck if we had sat down together with a glass of wine – or perhaps bottle of whiskey –and talked.”

“I was going to leave Paul. But you wanted everything now. It’s your fault it all fell apart. You are so impatient.”

“Your emails are gobbledygook. Blame me, I couldn’t give a fuck anymore.”

Next day

“Dear Mary, I am disappointed that our relationship became so toxic. Most people would let bygones be bygones. But I’m not most people. I want to understand what happened. I’ve given all our texts and emails to my friend Lucy. She is older and wiser. Maybe she’ll be able to tell me what I did wrong.”

“It is totally unethical sending my private emails to other people to read. It’s like a man sharing nude photos of his ex-girlfriend.”

“Mary, you say the most ridiculous things. When I last checked, revenge porn was illegal. Getting relationship advice from a friend is not. I simply shared your emails with a woman who does not know you and will never meet you.”

“Why do you need a stranger to help understand what happened? I sent a stupid text. I explained. That should have been the end of it. ”

“It wasn't the end of it though was it? You raised so many more issues. I was overwhelmed by your nastiness.”

“Your emails are so nasty. You made the advances, I was vulnerable and you took advantage.”

“Mary, How many times have you told me that you were vulnerable and I took advantage? 6, 8, 10? I’ve heard you loud and clear. When I met you, I saw you as an intelligent, funny, kind woman. I was attracted to you. You told me several times that you and Paul were breaking up, so I felt quite comfortable telling you how I felt about you. I am sad you think I took advantage of you.”

“I trust too easily.”

“For goodness sake, Mary. Can we please stop all this? As soon as you told me that Paul had “made you open the pet shop,” I knew we would never have a close relationship. Sooner or later you would think: “Lotti made me...” I did not know that it would be sooner. You said I almost made you kiss me. Thank goodness I did not make you almost have a picnic on the beach, buy a puppy or travel to Botswana. I simply cannot have a lover who doesn't have agency.”

“Paul didn’t force me to open the pet shop. He said it would be a good thing for me. I’m easily persuaded when I feel vulnerable.”

"I thought if you were nurtured in a loving, equitable relationship that was fun, stimulating and challenging (with me, of course!) you would not feel vulnerable."

"For the past month, I've been working every day. I've had no time to see you."

"Would you like to have dinner sometime in April? After we've both given our bruises time to heal. We could talk about what dicks we have been. I'll go first! Until then, be happy."

"Hi Lotti, I will be in touch soon. x"

"Please please Mary, take the time to read my email. I invited you to dinner *in April*. We both need a break from this."

"Lotti, If you want no contact until April then stop contacting me! Your message was confusing. I thought you'd say: 'I'm a dick' first."

"Mary, I am happy to say: 'I'm a dick' first. Here I go: I am a dick for trying to discuss serious stuff in emails. I never expected you to react so thoughtlessly and with such nastiness. Did you actually read any of my emails? I was a dick for not waiting until the next time I saw you, so we could talk – though I may have waited a lifetime. My mother said people needed to have a squabble with a friend/partner - to see if they are compatible. We proved we are not compatible. I feel lucky we found this out before anything started between us. It was like speed dating."

"Lotti, I won't be contacting you further."

"I am so glad to read (again) that you won't be contacting me further. I hope you stick to it this time. Bye Mary".

The next day

Dear Lotti, It seems neither of us understand each other. The dreaded "let's be friends" text was meant to be the beginning of a special love affair but you misinterpreted it! I told you several times I can't leave Paul right now. But you kept pressuring me to leave him. I'm a very good communicator, but I couldn't always answer my phone because I was with Paul. I didn't want him to hear me talking with you".

"Mary, What is wrong with you? At 7pm last night, you wrote: "I won't be contacting you further." And yet here you are this morning contacting me! I haven't read this email but I do hope it has a line: "Paul says..." This will make a ridiculous sitcom one day."

Lotti hoped this would be the end. Just in case Mary emailed again, she put an autoreply on her email: "Can you please stop."

"Your comment about Paul was mean!"

"Can you please stop".

"You're the initiator. I cannot respond if there is no contact!"

"Can you please stop."

"Don't send me provocative emails and then tell me not to respond. "

"Can you please stop."

"Paul saw the message you sent to the shop's Facebook Page. He thinks we had an affair."

"Can you please stop."

"You stop Lotti!"

"Can you please stop."

"Lotti, I've never thought I'd say this but I do not want to ever hear from you again."

"Can you please stop."

Next day

"Hi Lotti, I hope you can understand this email and it's not gobbledygook like all the others. I made a mistake with that text. I opened the shop the week after I sent it. When was I supposed to see you?"

"Mary, give it a rest."

"I feel sad that we ruined something special."

"Perhaps if you'd jumped in the car the day you sent the ménage à trois text, we could have sorted this out."

"Lotti, I didn't have time for anything. Your emails were mean and you swore! Overhearing your conversation with Scott was the last straw. Isn't he the bloke who is screwing a married woman?"

"Mary, only ASIO has permission to listen in on phone conversations! It's ironic that you judge Scott for having an extra-marital affair when Paul suggested you have one! You really should try thinking before you shoot off these emails."

"I should try thinking? You simply don't have a filter. People without filters will always struggle in relationships."

"Mary, I am too busy filtering to respond."

"You had the best education that money could buy. You're a privileged, educated lesbian manipulating a vulnerable woman. Over and out!"

“Roger that! I am relieved these texts and emails are over. We both made mistake after mistake. You felt bullied; I felt manipulated. You think I am superior. I think you react without thinking. I use swear words to communicate anger. I couldn’t give a fuck that you don’t like it. I really hope this is now THE END. Enjoy your pity party.”

“You need to get some serious help”.

“I was waiting for you to play the mental illness card. Maybe we should both pop into Bunnings to buy a filter. They may have a two-for-one deal.”

“The whole thing was crazy. The worst thing was when you betrayed me by sharing my emails.”

“So let me get this straight (pun intended). You did not betray Paul when you shared intimate details about him with your friends. I betrayed you when I asked a friend for some relationship advice. You really don’t have any personal insight, do you?”

“Fuck off Lotti.”

1st April

“Hi Mary, Do you want to talk? If yes, I will be outside the Arts Centre tomorrow night at 6pm. Be there or not. It’s your choice. This is not an April Fools joke. And please please please don’t reply to this email.”