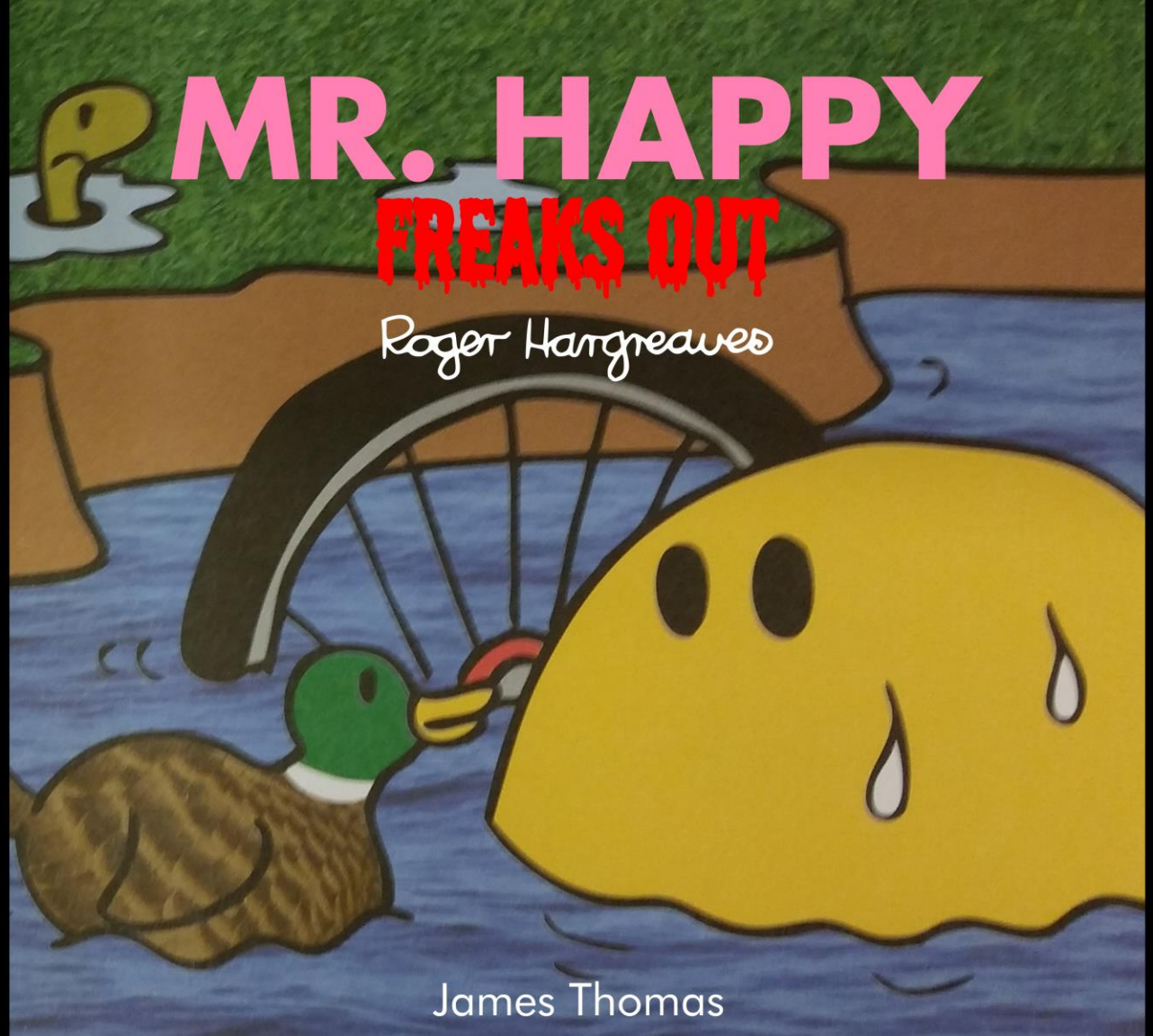

MR. HAPPY
FREAKS OUT
Roger Hargreaves
James Thomas

Mr Happy was happy. It was his whole thing.

Happy all day, happy all night.

"Another happy day!" he would exclaim each morning as he sat up in bed. "Oh joy!"

"What a happy time to eat breakfast!" he would say as he glanced at the clock.

Sometimes, as if to remind himself, he'd just say, "Happy!"

How exhausting!

He was so happy, you see, that it got on certain people's nerves. And he knew it. He may have been happy, but he was no fool.

"What's he so happy about?" Mr Grumpy would mutter. "Look at that stupid grin!"

"Ugh. He's happy again. What a surprise," Mr Grumble would moan. "Bah!"

But in Happyland, one had to be happy all the time.

The trees were happy. The flowers, too. Even the toilets, somehow.

It was just what you did, if you wanted to live there.

But one day, Mr Happy started to think about how happy he was, all day, every day.

His brain started heating up. Like a warm mug of tea, he thought.

The more he thought, the hotter he got. Like a sunny day.

Until he could take it no more. Like a boiling kettle.

So he ran out the door. Like a bolt of lightning.

Into the gate, which was closed. This slowed him down for a moment, and he walked down the hill, still smiling from ear to ear.

Down the hill.

Straight into the pond.

There he sat, dripping wet.

Just him, a bicycle wheel and a duck.

What a sorry sight!

But he had to cool down.

It was either that, or stick his head in the fridge.

The duck came to a stop, cocked his head and looked Mr Happy up and down.

"Well, well, well. Look at you," quacked the duck. "You've been here before, haven't you?"

Mr Happy, who looked like he'd lost a puppy, nodded his head.

"Yes," he replied. "I went through a… bad time."

The duck remembered it well. The spots. The bucket. The incoherent babbling. Little Miss Helpful giving up and running away.

"Oh yes, you've been in here before, all right. Anyway, it's nice to see you again," said the duck.

Mr Happy shivered.

"I get all sorts in here, you know," continued the duck. "You wouldn't believe the people I've had in this pond. So what's up?"

The duck leaned in. Mr. Happy looked round to see if anyone else was listening.

And do you know what he said?

“If I’m not happy all the time, I start to think-” he whispered.

“Think what?” the duck quacked.

“Anything!” exclaimed Mr Happy, a note of panic in his voice. “Anything at all. And it can happen anywhere! In the middle of a conversation, even!”

The duck circled around Mr Happy, with one eyebrow raised, and came to a stop in the same place as before.

“You mean to tell me that you can’t bear to think?”

Mr Happy nodded slowly.

"Go on," quacked the duck. "And don't mind me if I stick my head in the water. I'm just dabbling."

"Right. Well, whenever I start to think, my thoughts make me think of other thoughts, and so on. The problem is, there are only so many happy thoughts!"

He went on to list all the bad things he was afraid to think about.

"Death. That's one. You forget it, then you remember it again. I remembered it during a party once, and I had to hide in the bathroom. Forgetting things is another one. Just the idea that you can forget things. Isn't that awful? I don't know how Mr Forgetful does it!"

"I do," said the duck. "I'll tell you later."

He wasn't finished.

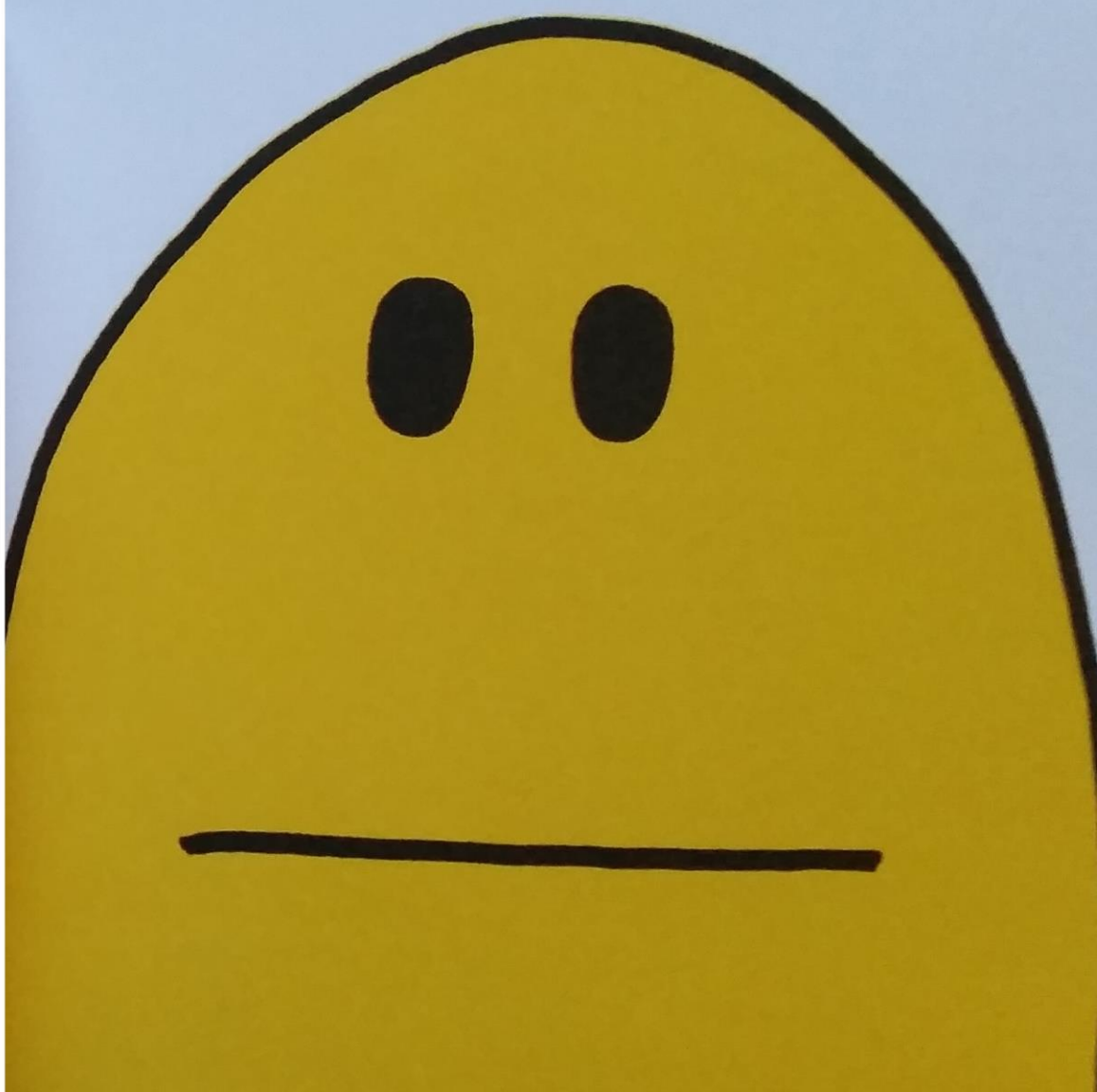
“Am I happy because I’m Mr Happy? Or am I Mr Happy because I’m happy?” he continued. “Who gave me this name, anyway?”

The duck dipped his beak in the water.

“And what about when I’m NOT happy? Am I still Mr Happy then, or something else entirely?”

“Hmm,” answered the duck. “What made you start thinking this way?”

Mr Happy had a think, which was the last thing he wanted to do.



Then he remembered something that had happened to him a long time ago.

“I was walking in the woods one day.”

“Collecting firewood?” asked the duck.

“Is that important?” asked Mr Happy.

“Not at all,” replied the duck. “I was just getting into the story.”

Mr Happy went on to recount his tale. He recalled how he’d found a door in a tree; and inside the tree, he’d found a staircase; and at the bottom of he staircase, he’d found a room; and in the room, he’d found Mr Miserable.

“Miserable, was he?” asked the duck.

“Yes, that’s the fellow.”

Mr Happy told him that he had cheered Mr Miserable up, and that they had laughed and laughed.

The duck stopped him with a sharp quack.

“Let me guess. You think he was you?”

Mr Happy was amazed.

“Well, kind of, yes. He looked just like me, only his smile was upside-down. And you know what happened went I back to that tree the next day?”

“The door was gone?"

“No! The door was gone!” answered Mr Happy. "I mean, yes! The door was gone! It was like I imagined the whole thing."

The duck told Mr Happy that he wasn't alone.

He said that everybody in Misterland came to the pond once in a while. Some came twice in a while. And they would tell him all their secrets.

He let Mr Happy in on a few of them.

Little Miss Greedy only ate so much because she was upset. She had a lot of things to be upset about. Most of those things were Mr Men.

Mr Strong was fairly certain that the cannonball he'd tossed in last year's Cannonball-Tossing Contest had landed on a petting zoo.

Mr Uppity wasn't anywhere near as rich as he led people to believe. He only had one hat!

And Little Miss Lucky wasn't as lucky as her name suggested. In fact, she'd accumulated quite the gambling debt. (Snail racing, if you must know.)

Mr Happy shook his head in disbelief.

He had never gossipped before. It felt good and bad at the same time.

“Is that everything?” he asked, knowing full well that it wasn’t.

The duck quacked about Mr Rush’s heart condition, Little Miss Tidy’s anxiety medication and Mr Tickle’s… situation.

Everybody had secrets and problems and fears.

Mr Happy’s suddenly felt small in comparison.

The cold water probably wasn't helping.

"You're not the first to come to me with this problem, either."

"I'm not?" asked Mr Happy.

"No sir," said the duck. "What do you think happens if Mr Busy isn't busy all the time? Or if Little Miss Scatterbrain starts remembering things? Or if Little Miss Chatterbox stops talking?"

"They start… thinking?"

"Correct! And we can't have that, can we?"

Mr Happy shook his head.

"WRONG!" quacked the duck. It was more of a squack, really. Half squawk, half quack. The type of quack one tended to pay attention to.

"Thinking is what separates us from the worms!"

A nearby worm found this very upsetting.

"Everybody's scared. Nobody's perfect!" quacked the duck.

"Mr Perfect is," said Mr Happy.

"Don't make me laugh!" laughed the duck. "He's the worst of the lot!"

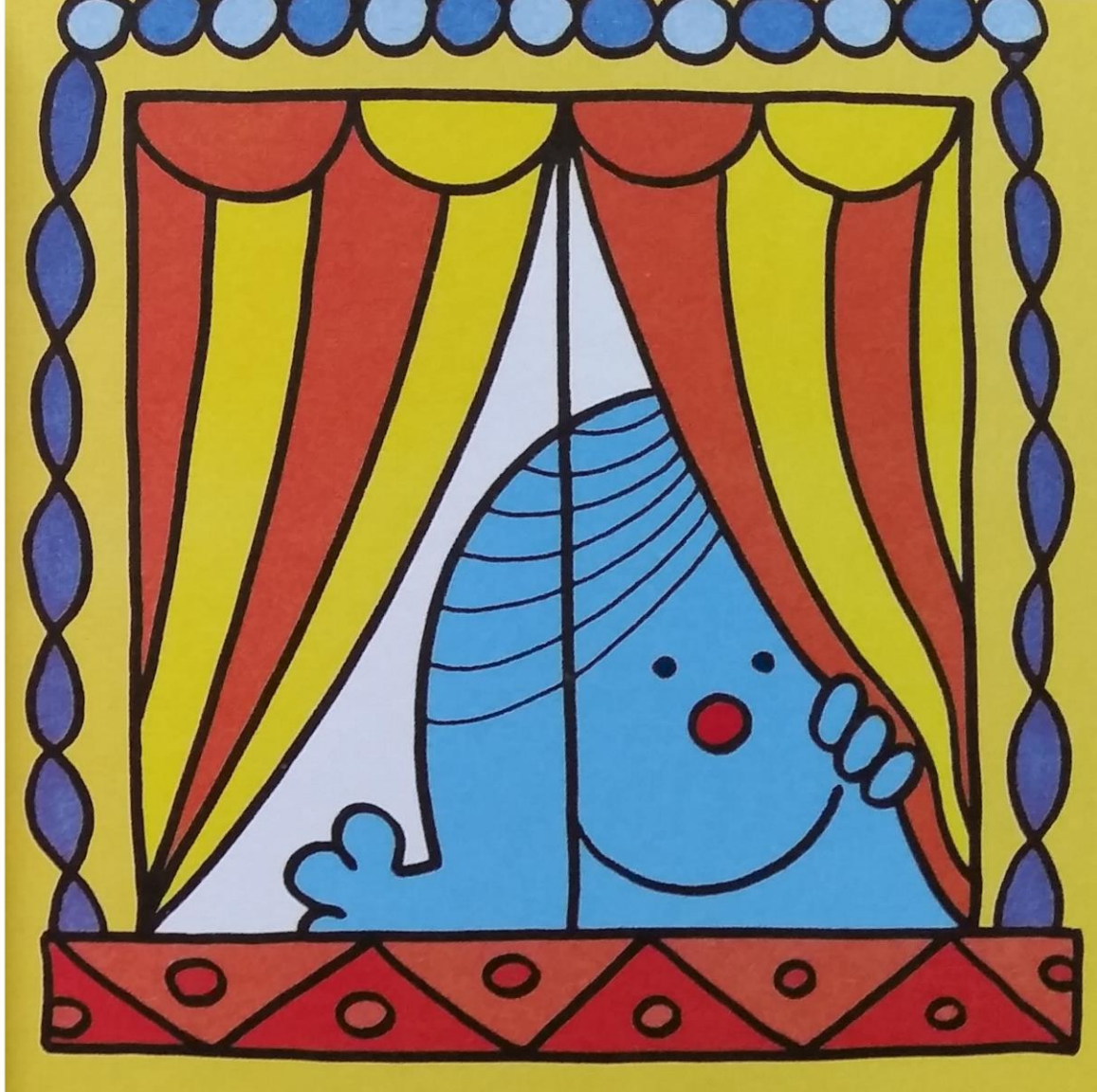
Mr Happy thought this was a very wise duck indeed.

"You must be the cleverest duck in Happyland," said Mr Happy.

"Ah," replied the duck, "but I'm from Cleverland. I moved here because I'd prefer to be happy than clever. Now I'm both!"

How very true!

"Lots of people want what you've got," continued the duck. "Except the spots."



This gave Mr Happy an idea.

He was convinced that the only people who were truly happy were the people who lived in Nonsenseland.

They didn’t care what anyone thought of them.

Take Mr Nonsense, for example. He was too busy being nonsensical to bother with other people’s opinions.

Why, just the other day, he spend nine hours taking a shoe for a walk!

Or Mr Silly. He didn’t care what anybody thought of his cake tricycle. All that mattered was that it was delicious, and it got him from B to A.

Or Little Miss Dotty. She wouldn't even notice what you called her! Cabbagehead. Sausagebrain. Anything at all.

"I know what I'll do. I'll move to Nonsenseland!" said Mr Happy.

"Very wise," said the duck.

"It's just... I feel like a fraud. I can't keep pretending to be happy when I'm not. I should go somewhere where nobody cares. Then I can actually be happy!"

"Everybody feels like a fraud! They're all scared that someone will find them out!" quacked the duck. "How exhausting!"

Well, yes.

"Just remember," he went on, "if you're afraid to be alone with your thoughts, just share them with someone. They're mostly rubbish, anyway."

Mr Happy finally smiled.

"There you go," quacked the duck. "You should surround yourself with the right people."

Mr Happy felt a lot better.

"Thanks, Mr Duck!" he said, as he stood up and clambered out of the pond.

"I don't really go in for names," answered the duck. "Bit restrictive. Now go and enjoy yourself!"

Mr Happy waved goodbye and went home to pack his bag. He passed Mr Clever on the way.

"I've been talking to a duck!" said Mr Happy.

"Not the clever one, I hope?" replied Mr Clever.

"People are weird," said the duck to himself.

Soon, Mr Happy had packed his toothpaste, toothbrush, motivational pamphlet, soap, accordion - and a few little biscuits just in case.

He sat down one last time in his happy cottage in Happyland. He was ready to leave. Fancy that, he thought! Easy as pie. No worries at all.

"I'm not thinking about ANYTHING," he said out loud in his big chair.

"I'm not even thinking about THINKING!" he added. "Wonderful!"

"I'm certainly not thinking about how little I'm thinking about thinking!" he continued.

Oh dear.

It was time to stop blathering on and get out before the thoughts got in!

He hopped on the train to Nonsenseland.

It was some journey.

Mr Happy tried everything he could, to push the thoughts out of his head. The more nonsensical, the better!

He bought everything in the restaurant carriage, then ate it in First Class. He played Solitaire in the toilet. He told himself the same joke a hundred times. He squeezed his eyes shut until he saw shapes.

This nonsense lark wasn't easy!

How did he know when he'd got there?

Well, in Nonsenseland, the rivers flow backwards, the rain falls up, the horses wear shorts and the lampposts have moustaches.

You can't miss it!

As he wandered about, Mr Happy soaked up all the nonsense around him.

"Happy Mr!" said Mr Topsy Turvy. "From away running you are what?"

"Myself!" chuckled Mr Happy.

"Well, you'll never find him here!" laughed Mr Nonsense.

And do you know something?

Mr Happy felt right at home!

Mr Silly said he could stay in his spare chimney. Little Miss Scatterbrain said he could stay in her bunk-bed, forgetting that she only had one bed. Mr Nonsense said he could sleep outside his tent.

Then they all skimmed fried eggs across the river.

Soon, Mr Happy forgot all his problems.

Then, he forgot his birthday.

Then, he forgot who he was.

Happy at last!

THANK YOU FOR READING

James Thomas
2016

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