

# LEMONGRASS IN SUMMER

## 夏日的檸檬草

\* Film adaptation *I am the Secret in Your Heart* released in 2024

*An outgoing and optimistic middle school girl falls for an aloof schoolmate, only to have the boy disappear after she accidentally reveals her feelings. Years later she finally learns that she wasn't alone in her affections....*

The outgoing and optimistic Hsiao-hsia, the perfect but aloof Cheng Yi, and the loyal, principled Yu-tzu – three school friends who are thick as thieves, but lack the courage to reveal their true feelings. Together, they leave behind a story of youth that is filled to the brim with each other, yet laced with regret.

Polite, good-looking, and a talented pianist to boot, Cheng Yi is the coveted Prince Charming of his middle school campus. Hoping to stand out from the crowd of Cheng Yi's fawning admirers, Hsiao-hsia gives him a hard time instead – and it seems to work! Could the normally aloof Cheng Yi be hinting that he has feelings for her, or is Hsiao-hsia just imagining things?

After their graduation ceremony, Hsiao-hsia accidentally reveals her true feelings. Before giving any kind of response, Cheng Yi moves overseas, leaving her heart filled with disappointment and unresolved questions. Having observed these ships pass in the night, Cheng Yi's close friend Yu-tzu gives up his first choice school so he can attend the same high school as Hsiao-hsia. He even joins the same school clubs so they can be together as her heart slowly heals. The two grow closer, but just as they seem on the verge of becoming an item, Cheng Yi returns from overseas.

At the heart of *Lemongrass in Summer* are the unspoken affections of



**Category:** Romance

**Publisher:** Cite Original

**Date:** 2/2024

**Pages:** 368

**Length:** 170,000 characters  
(approx. 110,500 words in English)

**Rights contact:**

bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

**Rights sold:** Korean (Book21),  
Indonesian (Penerbit Haru),  
Vietnamese (Nha Nam), Film  
(Rose)

youth: those deep, intense loves that only lack for the honesty to reveal themselves – first loves which are not easily forgotten because we’ve already lost the courage to love so deeply, so heedless of the consequences. Noteworthy for its absence of emotional fireworks, *Lemongrass in Summer* builds its affecting narrative with simplicity and restraint, charging the everyday interactions of school life with an innocent longing that will resonate with all but the most jaded readers. The addition of an epilogue from the perspective of Yu-tzu adds a wistful touch to the novel’s conclusion.

## Macchiato 瑪琪朵

Macchiato is a bestselling romance author whose novels have already sold more than 140,000 copies in Taiwan. A number of her works have sold print, film, and television rights in foreign markets. The film adaptation of *Lemongrass in Summer* was released in 2024, and foreign language editions of the novel have already appeared in Korea, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Her web series *My Little Princess*, which first appeared in 2016, was published as a novel in Thailand in 2019.

# LEMONGRASS IN SUMMER

By Macchiato

Translated by Sarah-Jayne Carver

## Chapter One: I Still Secretly Like You

I think it's fair to say that if every boy dreams of a beautiful girl-next-door like Shen Chia-yi from *You Are the Apple of My Eye*, then deep down every girl dreams of a handsome prince who happens to be class president. Since I was a kid, I always had the impression that class presidents were these brilliant, dazzling creatures. My brother, Feng, was two years older than me and president of his class. He won so many awards and trophies that he had to put them in storage and organize them by category! The only real flaw in his perfect life was me, his deadbeat sister.

My teachers often resorted to quotes from old philosophers and poets like: "if we look up to others and follow in their stead, we can all achieve great things", or "we all have talents, it's up to us to use them." I think these were supposed to be encouraging.

One day, I asked Feng: "How do you become class president? Is there some kind of path to success I can follow?"

"I don't really have to study that hard," he said, frowning as though he'd never thought about it before. "I just read something once and then I remember it."

No wonder I'd never been class president. I often suspected that I may have been adopted or that I had some kind of genetic mutation. Maybe my parents had brought the wrong baby home from the hospital. How else could we have the same parents but such different brains?

We went on a family trip once where I got carsick and threw up on Feng.

"Hsia, what the hell!!" he yelled, pointing at me. "It's like you're missing a cerebellum or something! Maybe your parents never gave you one. It's flat ground out there and you still somehow manage to get motion sickness."

Wait, what? Don't we have the same parents? This question bounced around in my mind for a long time, then my imagination ran wild with it until I eventually came to the irrefutable conclusion that my mom and dad probably weren't my biological parents.

One day just after I started elementary school, I was trying to do my homework after lunch, but I was struggling to write with my clumsy, feeble hands.

"Your words look like earthworms!" shouted Feng, grabbing an eraser and rubbing the whole page out in three quick swipes, the dust flying everywhere until my Mandarin assignment was just a blank page.

"Did you forget to bring your brain home from school? You don't remember anything the teacher said! Look, this one's wrong, and so's that one, they're all wrong!" He rubbed the eraser across my math exercises three times and shook off the dust, so now they were all blank too.

"Feng, you suck! Why do you even care about my homework?" I was so angry that I jumped on the chair and grabbed my pencils, workbooks and textbooks off the table and started throwing them all at him.

"You're so stupid, no one would believe you're my sister!" he shot back, dodging my throws.

"Who would even want to be your sister? Just leave me alone!" I yelled.

"You don't want to be my sister? Fine by me!" Feng made a karate-chop gesture with his hand then slammed the door.

Fine, I'm not your sister!

My tears pitter pattered as they fell on the blank pages of my workbook.

When no one was looking, I hastily stuffed some bread and snacks in a small bag and decided to run away from home. I walked out of my house, which sat at the end of an alley, and followed the path beside the train tracks towards the city center. I forgot how long I walked for or how far I went, but after a while I got tired and saw a small park with a lone swing. I sat down and swung back and forth staring up at the sky.

A black dog sat watching me from a distance. I threw a half-eaten doughnut at it. The dog sniffed it and ate it in two or three bites, then slowly walked a little closer to me. I threw a pineapple bun, and he wolfed it down before coming even closer. By the time he was less than three steps away from me, he was staring up at me with his huge, innocent eyes. They were darting around but I had already thrown him all the food that I'd had in my bag.

"Hey buddy, are you looking for your mom?" I asked, tears streaming down my cheeks like an open faucet. As my eyes blurred with tears, I thought about the showdown between Mazinger Z and Baron Ashura on TV tonight and wondered what would happen. Then I started thinking about all the marbles I'd hoarded in the powdered milk can under my bed – it took years of battles to collect those! And my mom's pigs' feet stew with potatoes cooking in the kitchen, it had smelt so good as I left, but now I wouldn't be able to have any...

I crouched down to pet the dog which rolled over, exposing its round black belly.

A shadow appeared on the ground in front of me, and when I looked up and saw a boy about my age standing there. He was resting one foot on a ball and looked intrigued by the small dog.

"What's his name?" he asked.

"Blanc," I replied.

"Blanc? But he's black." He looked confused.

"He's got a white bit here." I scooped up the puppy and pointed to the heart-shaped patch of white fur on his upper belly.

"Oh, I get it," he replied, squatting down and reaching out his hand. "Hey Blanc, come here...."

The dog licked his hand.

"I haven't seen you before, did you just move here?"

"No, I live really far from here."

"Really far? Like, did you take a plane?"

I couldn't speak for a moment, so I just shook my head.

"Is Blanc your dog?"

"No, he's just lost. He can't find his mom."

"So, you're from out of town and you're here with a lost dog...."

He flashed me a smile.

"Do you want to play some ball?"

We spent that afternoon chasing the soccer ball all over the park. The boy seemed like he didn't have a care in the world, his peals of laughter rang through the space like a silver bell as he ran and ran. It wasn't a big park, so we ran round and round in circles, our faces reddening from the sun. We joked around while we played, deliberately tripping each other over and laughing so hard we couldn't breathe. The dog ran alongside us, barking and jumping. The sun hung in the distant sky like a glistening yellow egg yolk and my stomach began to rumble.

"Oh, I should head home," I sighed.

The boy stopped smiling.

"Can Blanc stay with you for a bit?" I begged.

He looked silently at the dog then back to me again,

"If I take him home, will you come back tomorrow?"

"Definitely! I'll come find you."

"My house is right there, turn right at the third streetlight, my place is the one with the green metal gate," he replied, pointing behind him. He gestured towards a bunch of Japanese-style villas that all looked nearly identical from the outside.

"My granddad planted a bunch of this grass, you'll know it's my house from the smell," he said, pulling a leaf out of his pocket and rubbing it between his fingertips before holding it up to my nose.

An unfamiliar scent filled my nostrils, it smelled faintly of lemon.

"What kind of grass is this?"

"Lemongrass."

Seeing my confusion, he smiled and said, "If not, I'll just wait for you in the park tomorrow."

"Okay! Pinky promise, whoever breaks it is a mangy mutt!" I linked pinkies with him and carefully stamped his thumb to seal the deal.

I ran back home along the same road, and after a while I saw my brother standing on the curb waiting for me with tears in his eyes. He wiped his face when he saw me come closer, then he picked me up and carried me home.

My first ever "adventure" running away from home was already over and it wasn't even 6pm. I was back in time to watch the opening theme song for *Mazinger Z*. My mom even gave me the biggest portion of pigs' feet stew to comfort me.

The next day, I walked back along the path beside train tracks, but I couldn't find the park again. Was the boy waiting there for me? Would he be mad that I hadn't turned up? Would he think I was a total backstabber? And would he take care of Blanc? Would he be able to help Blanc find his mom?

Over the years, the boy and the little black dog gradually faded from my mind, and eventually so much time passed that I could no longer recall any trace of them.

\*

On my little adventure, I learned one very real but brutal lesson: if you want to be a hero, you need to know how to feed yourself. That day made me realize that it didn't really matter if you were stupid, it was way more important to make sure you had a full stomach. Even if I'd been the best student in the whole grade, or even the whole school, or heck, even the whole country, it wouldn't have guaranteed anything. It's not like having a certificate that said "Ultimate First Place" or "The Best in the World" automatically got you the biggest portion of pigs' feet stew. And in that case, coming first was really more of a loss.

Cheng Yi was the kind of class president who was always the best at everything. I first met him when I was in fourth grade. That day, Yu-tsu and I were both on duty and clapping erasers in the corridor outside, which meant we were mostly just messing around and blowing chalk dust at each other. There was a sudden gust of wind, so I grabbed two erasers and smacked them together with a loud bang. The dust got swept up in the breeze, creating a dense white mist in front of me.

At that exact moment, Cheng Yi came through the mist, and everything happened in slow motion like we were in a movie. The white dust caught in the sunlight, and it looked like he was surrounded by all these clear, glittering crystals. He had fair skin and shimmering dark eyes beneath double eyelids and lashes that were so long they made the girls jealous. Between that and his perfectly straight nose, he looked almost a bit too delicate, but thankfully the contrast with his thick eyebrows gave him an imperious air. With his rosy lips and perfectly curved chin, he looked like one of those boyishly charming anime characters, so good-looking he could get away with murder.

Unfortunately, he didn't exactly have a glowing first impression of me.

He frowned and cupped his hands over his mouth, coughing slightly.

"I'm so sorry!" I apologized, feeling flustered. I wanted to give him a Kleenex but after digging around in my skirt pocket for a while, all I could find was a crumpled piece of toilet paper.

His frown deepened.

My hand, still clutching the toilet paper, hung awkwardly in the space between us.

"Excuse me," he said eventually.

I hastily pulled back my hand and it hung awkwardly in the space between us.

He strode past me, and I saw the name embroidered on his chest: Cheng Yi.

It wasn't a glamorous introduction by any means, just a sky filled with chalk dust on an ordinary summer afternoon, but it was as though I'd somehow been struck by lightning. I really liked him.

When girls have a crush, they tend to start doing stupid things. Well, at least I did! Why else would I have written his name in tiny letters all over the margins of my textbooks and exercise books? I could set myself off in an unstoppable fit of giggles just by thinking about how handsome he was. I even hung around outside his classroom when the bell rang and secretly wrote down his schedule, including all his extracurricular activities, that way I could run into him on campus and pretend like I hadn't realized he'd be there.

I went so far as to follow him home one day which was how I discovered that he had a vicious black dog. The dog found me and came flying towards me, but Cheng Yi had zero intention of stepping in and playing the hero. Instead, he casually clasped his hands behind his back and wore a half-smile on his face as he watched the drooling dog approach me. I was so scared that I ran away crying for my parents and didn't dare go near his house again.

Cheng Yi was the pianist for the school choir, so I bravely auditioned to join despite the fact that I was tone-deaf and had no idea how to read music, but this way I had a genuine excuse to see him every day. The choir had a rigorous training schedule with practice every morning Monday to Friday before class, and we even had rehearsals on holidays if there was a competition the next day.

Cheng Yi usually got there extra early to practice the piano. Well, he might have said it was to practice, but he often played non-choir pieces which I was surprised to find were mostly western pop songs. Each morning before the teacher and our classmates arrived, he would play the piano and I'd sit in the corner stealing glances at him while I flipped through a book or ate breakfast. It felt like the best kind of happiness. I was bewitched by his piano playing like a rat following the Pied Piper. I would be their rain or shine, even when I had a cold or a fever. I would be lying in bed groaning one minute, but in a flash my feet would be dragging me to choir practice all by themselves.

One drizzly morning, I got to the classroom and found Cheng Yi was already there playing a song. It was a slightly sad tune, but his face wore a tender, tranquil smile.

"It's called 'The Rose.'" He hummed along softly, wrapped up in his own thoughts.

Wow! This was the first time Cheng Yi had ever spoken to me directly, and he was even singing to me. I could talk a mile a minute and was almost never at a loss for words, but just then I found myself totally tongue-tied.

"Uh-huh," I gulped, forcing down some saliva. My face burned and my throat ached.

He suddenly walked over to me and put his hand on my forehead. The coldness of his hand made me jump and I flinched, straining my neck away from him.

"You're sick," he said, frowning a little.

"Haha, it's just a cold, I'm fine..." I replied, sticking out my tongue. "I don't even need a jacket!"



He took off his jacket and draped it over me.

"It's cold and it's going to rain all day, give it back to me tomorrow."

It was still warm from his body heat and had a faint scent of lemongrass, sweet and refreshing.

"Thank you," I giggled.

"No worries." He looked me up and down expressionlessly. "We've got a competition coming up, you don't want to make anyone else sick."

His tone had been so cold and indifferent. He sat back down at the piano.

*We've got a competition coming up, you don't want to make anyone else sick.*

Jeez, what a weirdo. Would it kill him to say something nice?

"Cheng Yi!"

A happy, melodic voice rang through the room. Cheng Yi looked up.

Li Hsueh-erh appeared in the doorway and effortlessly sauntered over to the piano. She confidently sat down beside him and played a series of notes with her long fingers.

"This is the one you were just playing, right?" she glanced at him, beaming.

"Yeah," he said with a slight smile.

That was Li Hsueh-erh, student president of Class B and our choir's lead soprano. But seriously though, what the hell? She was so devious; she came out of nowhere!

I noticed something solid in the inner chest pocket of Cheng Yi's jacket, so I pulled it out and saw the photo on his student ID smiling up at me. Suddenly feeling a bit devious myself, I stole it and hid it at the bottom of my pencil case, burying it under a bunch of pens like I was covering up a secret. I didn't tell him that I had actually brought my jacket to school that day and it was just sitting in my locker. Instead, I found myself feeling positively gleeful whenever I saw him shivering or rubbing his hands together and blowing on them.

The next day, I gave him the jacket back and he rummaged through the inside pocket.

"Hsia, have you seen my student ID."

"What student ID?" I asked, playing dumb.

"That's weird, it was definitely in here. Where is it?"

"Are you sure it was in there? Maybe you left it somewhere and forgot about it. Do you want to look for it?"

"I don't constantly lose stuff like you do, Hsia. If I said I put it in my jacket pocket, then it would be in my jacket pocket!" He glared at me. "You really haven't seen it?"

"No, I haven't!"

So, I'd been the villain all along...If you were so into someone that you thought shamelessness was more or less the same as bravery, then it had to be true love, right? Clearly, the heavens were so moved by my love for Cheng Yi that they put us in the same class from fifth grade all the way to the end of junior high. Back then I was just a stupid kid who was desperate to be in love.

I liked the small nod he did when he saw me because he'd been raised well, but was also a bit shy. I liked how the corners of his mouth would turn up in a little smile whenever he caught



a glimpse of the doodles I'd scrawled in the margins of my music sheets, so I drew even more. I liked it when he bit his lower lip and did that pen spinning trick. I liked how his voice rose slightly on the second syllable when he shouted "stand up, salute" at the beginning of choir practice. I liked the way he stood at the front of the procession with his straight back and confident posture, and how the morning light dappled through the trees as though it was dancing across his face. I liked all his traits exactly the way they were, even his typical Virgo obsession with cleanliness, his strangely pedantic tendencies, and his inscrutable precociousness and aloofness.

What else could you do when you liked someone at that age? I wasn't really into the stupid things other girls did to let their crush know how they felt, like giving them candy, cookies or chocolate, or asking math questions. I guess you could always confess your love in person? Eleven out of ten girls who tried this with Cheng Yi came back in tears, with the eleventh being a random passerby who cried in shock. Or maybe you could write him a love letter? All the signed ones were returned to their respective senders, and any unsigned ones were posted on the bulletin board.

I used my tiny, Machiavellian brain to analyze everything I knew and began to carefully formulate a plan. Maybe it would be easier to make Cheng Yi like me, or perhaps it would be easier to make him hate me? There was no obvious solution to this question, but the most important thing was that I got his attention. To do this, I specialized in finding ways to annoy him, as well as constantly taking the opposite stance to him on things, and just generally messing with him.

I started calling him "Pee-wee Cheng Yi", because of how it rhymed. For a while I kept trying to get everyone to call him that, but his eyes shot daggers at me as he menacingly clutched the roll call list, and our classmates had no choice but to support me silently in spirit.

We were voting on where to go for a class trip. Cheng Yi had proposed Shoushan, but I insisted on nominating Cijin District.

"There's a zoo at Shoushan, so we can see a ton of animals that we'd usually just read about in textbooks. Won't it be great to 'make learning fun'?" he said in an attempt to convince the opposition with a well-reasoned argument. Heck, he even used idioms.

"I get carsick!" I replied, confidently standing my ground. "Those windy mountain roads are gonna make me throw up on the bus!"

He glanced Yu-tsu, who I shared a desk with.

"Please don't make me sit next to her!" wailed Yu-tsu, covering his face.

"Alright..." said Cheng Yi through gritted teeth. "Hsia, if you sit next to me on the bus I'll help you out."