

MEETING AND MISSING YOU

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A high school student who lost her mother to illness longs to experience the kind of perfect love her parents had. Then, even as she is still trying to understand what love is, she meets someone whom she feels inexplicably close to, someone who was important to her even before they met! Taiwan's queen of Gen Z romance, Misa, writes about first loves in her latest full-length fantasy novel.

It has always been Lin Pei's dream to have an earth-shattering romance before she graduates from high school. After betting a friend that she can find someone to fall in love with within three months, she boldly asks out the most popular guy at school, only to discover that he already has a crush on her friend. Things get even more complicated when Lin Pei learns that the guy her friend has a crush on is actually interested in herself. Even before she's figured out what love is, Lin Pei is already entangled in a love quadrangle!

Bookworm Chieh's life revolves around homework and tests until, one day, the new transfer student topples her from the top of the testing leaderboards. Unwilling to admit defeat, she marks the bad-boy newcomer as her academic adversary. However, unbeknownst to Chieh, this bad-boy cares far less about grades than he does about his romantic daydreams concerning Chieh. Is it possible that this model student and clever troublemaker are a match made in heaven?

Each absorbed in their own problems, these two high school girls miraculously meet, and soon they are sharing their deepest thoughts concerning life, romance, and the all-important question of exactly what it is that makes someone fall in love. As their discussions unfold, a strange feeling takes hold of them. Could they be more than strangers who met by chance? Might they have met in their past lives, and now karma has brought them together once more?



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Rights contact:

bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

With its lucid and flowing prose, *Meeting and Missing You* is a touchingly true-to-life narrative that deftly blends in elements of fantasy, taking readers back to a time when our biggest troubles always seemed to revolve around friends, family, and romance. This vivid portrayal of the tentative steps and inevitable stumbles of youthful romance is a time machine of the spirit, sending readers straight to the heart of their own innocent first loves.

Misa 尾巴

Popular with young adult readers, Misa is a bestselling author of romance, horror, and fantasy whose books have sold over 420,000 copies in Taiwan. Her novel *My Best Friend's Breakfast*, based on a true love story posted to an online forum, was adapted to film and released in Taiwan in 2022. Rights to her works have been sold in multiple countries.

MEETING AND MISSING YOU

By Misa

Translated by Sarah-Jayne Carver

Chapter One: Lin Pei

I'm not sure if everyone feels this way, but personally I think you have to fall in love during high school. Okay, that might be a bit much, but come on, surely you should have at least one secret crush that's seared into your heart forever? For me, it would be like this key part of my youth that I could cherish for the rest of my life, something that I could savor time and again for years to come. Or it should be, anyway.

My mindset mostly stems from my parents' experience. They met and dated during high school, then after going through a lot of highs and lows together, they tied the knot and had me. Everyone says that children are shaped by their parents' relationship, so it makes sense that I've always yearned for that kind of high school romance because I saw how well things had worked out for them.

I got dressed, put on my tie, and went into the living room to grab breakfast. Dad always made sure to buy me breakfast even though he left early for work. As I munched on my hash brown and egg pancake, I wandered over to the small cabinet by the living room which contained an array of photographs of Mom. There were some of her and Dad together from the days when it had just been the two of them, as well as their wedding photos and snapshots of everyday life after I was born. Right in the middle stood a family photo of the three of us that had been taken when I was ten.

"Hey Mom, great weather again today, huh?" I said, sitting down in front of the cabinet to chat to her as I always did. I sat here every day before I left for school, and again before I went to bed at night. Her beautiful smile in the photograph was just like I remembered, always calmly listening to my issues no matter how trivial they were. If she was still with us, I have no doubt she'd be here listening to me talk about my tedious concerns each day.

"Alright, I better head to school. Maybe today's the day I'll find my storybook romance, just like you and Dad. Wish me luck!"

I grabbed my book bag and slipped on my polished leather shoes, then strode out the door with my head held high.

When I'd applied for high school, my first choice had been my parents' alma mater, Flatland High, because the idea of meeting my future partner in the same place seemed incredibly romantic. However, I ended up getting into North High, which was actually most people's first choice. I, on the other hand, cried my eyes out and told Dad that I wanted to give up my place and go to Flatland High instead.

"I've never heard of anyone actively choosing to lower their aspirations," he scoffed.

My middle school homeroom teacher was so desperate to maintain his stellar admission rate that he kept begging me to reconsider. North High eventually became my top choice, and I gave up on my original plan to go to Flatland High, but only after I'd wept about it for ages in front of Mom's photograph, insisting that if she was still here, she would totally support my decision to lower my aspirations and go to her alma mater. Looking back on it now, I realize just how melodramatic I was being. Even though I still feel a slight sense of regret that I didn't go to Flatland High, in the end I'm glad I decided to go to North High. I've been so happy here and have made a good group of friends.

"Hey, Lin Pei!"

I wasn't even at school yet and I'd already run into my close friend Chia-mi. Her name "Chia" was pronounced the same as the Mandarin word for "home", but most people didn't know the written character for it, so they mispronounced it as "Ka", like in "ka-fei" (coffee) and "ka-li" (curry). She had seriously considered changing her name at one point.

"Hey, Chia-mi. Where's your boyfriend?" I teased, glancing behind her.

The color started to rise in her cheeks.

"Jeez don't, he hates it when you guys say that."

"I know, but I just can't resist," I replied, stifling my laughter.

A moment later, Tan Hsu stepped out of the breakfast place behind us carrying two bags of food.

"Morning," he nodded at me, handing one of the bags to Chia-mi.

"Thanks," she said, acting nonchalant, although it didn't escape my notice that her cheeks had gone even redder than before.

"Ugh, how nice. I wish someone would buy me breakfast every day," I said pointedly, which earned me a fierce glare from Chia-mi. Tan Hsu frowned slightly.

"Hey, I offered," he shrugged. "You were the one who said your dad already got you breakfast every day. And it's not like I bought it for Chia-mi, we just decided to grab breakfast on our way to school. She saw you and decided to come say hi, so I hung back to pick up our orders."

I couldn't help rolling my eyes.

"Alright, alright, thanks for the detailed explanation, Tan Hsu."

"Well, you were out here talking trash, I had to say something," he replied, mirroring my eyeroll.

"Come on, let's get to school," said Chia-mi, lightening the mood. Holding her breakfast in one hand, she linked her other arm through mine, and we ambled along slowly.

"Seriously though," she whispered in my ear. "Don't joke like that."

I shrugged it off.

"Okay, got it." Even as I said it, I knew I'd still tease them about it next time.

Chia-mi and Tan Hsu were childhood sweethearts. They'd known each other since they were babies and had grown up together. It was like the plot from a manga. Chia-mi had inevitably fallen for Tan Hsu even though he was pretty ordinary-looking. Whether or not he felt the same

way about Chia-mi remained a great unknown despite the fact she was drop-dead gorgeous. And I mean, it's not exactly like she'd let me ask him. I remember once I asked her how someone that beautiful could be into such an average-looking dude and she just told me I had questionable taste. I think my mind might have this built-in system where if I find out one of my friends likes someone then that person automatically becomes irrelevant, so once I knew that Chia-mi liked Tan Hsu I'd subconsciously blurred out his facial features.

Suddenly out of nowhere, I felt someone tap me lightly on the back of the head.

"Morning."

I whirled round and glared at the idiot standing in front of me.

"Ugh. David, you're so annoying."

His real name was Dai-wei but somehow it managed to sound just as ridiculous in both English and Mandarin. He was the class clown and, as much as I hated to admit it, he was actually pretty good-looking.

"Why are the three of you blocking the door? Get to class already, jeez." He turned to Tan Hsu and raised an eyebrow. "Hey, are you still on for our bet today?"

"Oh yeah definitely."

"You guys are so annoying," I repeated. What kind of stupid, nerdy tradition was this?

"Are you guys in?" David asked.

Chia-mi and I both shook our heads.

"The college entrance exams aren't until next year, why are you in such a rush to get competitive about test scores right now?" I asked, confused.

"Nah, you have to keep your mind sharp at all times, you can't just slack off," he replied, resting his hands behind his head.

"Well, I think we should make the most of having the time to date while we can, it's what these years are for."

David burst out laughing.

"You can't be serious. You're looking for love in a Taiwanese high school?"

"It sounds like the title of a light novel," said Chia-mi, letting a little giggle slip out.

David could mock me all he wanted; I couldn't care less. It wasn't going to change what I wanted. After all, North High might have become my top choice, but it certainly didn't mean I was going to give up on my dream of having a high school romance.

"You say you want to fall in love, but we're already in second year. Are you even into anyone?" Tan Hsu asked, looking right at me.

"What?"

"You know you actually need to be into someone before you date them, right?" he asked, staring at me like I was an idiot, with this extremely punchable look on his face.

"Yeah, who do you like? I can help you out," David chipped in.

Oh right. As much as I wanted to be in love, there was no one I was actually into.

"Ugh, well, alright then. Today I'll start looking for someone to have a crush on."

It was such a bold claim and so fundamentally ridiculous to think I could find someone just like that, almost as though I would be falling in love just for the sake of it. Look, I just really wanted to experience a high school romance, okay? And who knows, maybe this crush would turn out to be my lifelong partner.

Our school day began with a study period where we were each assigned an area of the classroom to clean, so Tan Hsu and I grabbed our equipment and headed out to the hallway. He kept staring at me like I was an idiot. Like he thought what I'd said was stupid. I initially pretended like I hadn't noticed but in the end I couldn't hold back.

"Hey, if you've got something to say, just say it. Stop with the punchable face, already."

"Say what? Something about that totally asinine thing you just said? That starting today you're gonna go out looking for someone to have a crush on, like you're searching for a four-leaf clover or something. Heck, that would be way more realistic than whatever the hell this is."

"Seems like you had a whole lot to say," I replied, simultaneously wiping the window and glaring at his reflection in the shiny glass.

"Okay then, let's make a bet. I think I'll find a four-leaf clover before you find someone you like."

"Now that's truly idiotic," I said, rolling my eyes. "What does the winner get?"

"Didn't you just say it was stupid?" he said with a slight smile. "How about we each have to do something for the other person?"

"That's way too broad, we need some ground rules."

"What kind of rules?"

"Like we can't ask the person to do something embarrassing or illegal, and we can't make the other person come top or bottom of the class."

"Those are such weird rules, you really think I'd be that sneaky?"

"Who knows," I shrugged.

"Alright, how about we say that we can't make the other person do something against their will, and it can't be something that harms anyone else. Is that good?"

"Okay," I nodded, satisfied. "Time limit?"

"Three months."

"Way too short." I bit my lip and pondered for a moment. "It's just to find someone I like, I don't have to be in a relationship, right?"

"Oh, you're gonna play it safe? That's cool with me, just don't pick some random guy you don't even like and lie to me because time's running out."

"Deal." Even as I said it, I thought to myself that if it didn't work out, I could still lie and he probably wouldn't know.

"Okay, but I'll know if you're lying."

"Are you a mind reader or something? How the hell did you know what I was thinking?"

"Damn, you were really planning to lie?" Tan Hsu shook his head. "I'll be able to tell if you have a crush on someone."

He said it with so much confidence. I just shrugged and wished him luck. And so began my three-month bet with Tan Hsu.

Now that I was actively searching for someone to have a crush on, I had to start by understanding what it truly meant to be into someone. It was embarrassing to say, but I'd never felt that way about anyone before, so I didn't have a clue what it really meant. I'd read a lot of *shōjo* manga and watched countless teen dramas, and of course I'd been listening to stories about my parents' relationship since I was a kid, all of which had given me a vague understanding of crushes and romance. However, without any real-life experience, the details were still murky. And among my friends I'm pretty sure the only person I could ask was Chia-mi.

"Why do you like Tan Hsu?" I asked her over lunch as we ate our bento boxes. She jumped in surprise and frantically looked around, terrified that someone might have overheard.

"Lin Pei, are you crazy? How could you ask me out loud like that? What if someone heard you?"

I looked at the garden to our right and the pond to our left. Not a soul in sight.

"Oh hun, we're eating lunch in the garden, who the hell's gonna hear us?"

"The walls have ears!"

Seeing her face go bright red, I couldn't bring myself to tell her that a lot of people already knew she liked Tan Hsu. Then, suddenly I realized this was exactly what Tan Hsu meant. If you really liked someone, it was easy to tell because you blushed. In the manga I'd read, they used diagonal lines to show that a character was blushing, but humans didn't blush that easily in real life, at least not the ones I'd seen in dramas. Chia-mi's cheeks on the other hand were bright red, so maybe different people blushed in different ways?

"Why do you ask?" she said.

She looked really jealous when I explained the bet I'd made with Tan Hsu.

"It's so nice that you guys are assigned the same area to clean. I can't believe you get to chat alone, I'm so jealous."

"But you guys have been friends forever and you've seen him every step of the way. You even commute together every day and sometimes your families meet up for meals on the weekends. How can you be jealous that Tan Hsu and I spend twenty minutes together?"

"That's just it though, I want to spend every second with Tan Hsu."

Was that what it meant to like someone? That you wanted every part of them? It seemed kind of scary.

"You've known each other for so long. Do you know when you started liking him?"

"I honestly have no idea. By the time I'd realized, I already had a crush on him."

"How's that even possible?"

"It's one of those things that builds up over time, it's just like constantly growing and fermenting until it becomes this chemical reaction that impacts your body and mind, then you suddenly realize you're in love."

"Damn, sounds profound."

“Think about it though. In all the dramas you’ve watched, the leads always fall in love over time, right?”

“I’ve seen some where they fall in love at first sight too.”

“That still counts! Anyway, I think liking someone is a feeling that only officially exists once you realize it’s there.”

“Okay,” I nodded. “Then why do you like Tan Hsu?”

“How should I know? I just like everything about him, the good and the bad. Of course there’s stuff I can’t stand, but I still like him anyway.” Her eyes suddenly looked sad. “Sometimes though, I have this feeling, like there’s a kind of distance between us.”

“What sort of distance?”

“It’s as you said, we’ve always been together since we were kids, so obviously we’re super close, but I always feel like I don’t really understand him.”

“But you think he understands you, right?”

“I actually don’t think he does.”

“That’s what I mean though! It’s impossible to understand each other completely. Look at my parents, they got married and had me, but even they didn’t truly understand each other.”

“How would you know? Your mom’s—” She stopped mid-sentence and clamped her hand over her mouth. “I’m sorry.”

“Oh god, don’t apologize.”

I rarely talked about my mom with my friends, they’d always awkwardly apologize, or they just didn’t know how to react.

I looked at Chia-mi and gave her a smile, so she knew it was fine.

My mom died when I was eleven, and even though it was only six years ago, my memories of her had become weirdly hazy. When I closed my eyes, I couldn’t immediately recall what she looked like. What I could remember were all the stories she used to tell me about falling in love with Dad. Maybe it’s because she would often whisper these stories in my ear about their courtship, or how they’d eloped and had me, or how hard she’d worked to support our family after they got married. Her voice was so soft and gentle. My favorites were the stories about how they’d fallen in love, those were the ones that made me long for high school. One time, Dad had blushed bright red and asked her to stop talking about it.

She had always been pretty healthy until she gave birth to me and didn’t give her body enough time to rest afterwards. At the time, she figured she was young and immediately threw herself into her work. Her body had become weaker and more susceptible to catching colds, but it shouldn’t have been an issue as long as she took care of herself. It made for a perfect storm. She had this long-term cough that she went to the doctor for a bunch of times. They gave her a lot of different medications, but she didn’t show any signs of improvement. Her weakened immune system meant she got the flu which caused a series of viral infections. Then, before we knew it, she was gone forever.

It was the first time I ever saw my dad cry, but he made an effort to put on a brave face for my sake. Even still, I often caught him staring at photos of her for ages, before silently removing

his glasses to wipe away the tears. And on days when someone mentioned her, he would always have a drink that night. Maybe that was why I almost completely stopped talking about her in front of him. All the love that he felt was also the cause of such deep pain.

This thought stopped me in my tracks. If being in love was the next level beyond liking someone, how long did you have to like them before it became love?

“Hey, Lin Pei?”

“Oh, sorry. I got lost in thought there.” I smiled apologetically at Chia-mi. “I was just thinking about how in love my parents were.”

“I think liking someone in high school is nowhere near the kind of love that our parents experience in marriage, right?” she asked, with a giggle. “The love your mom and dad had is in a whole different ballpark from my feelings for Tan Hsu.”

“You should still cherish those feelings, though,” I said, smiling faintly. “Sometimes, I feel like my dad loved my mom too much. I wish he could let go just slightly; I think it would make his life a little bit better.”

While on some level it was comforting to see that he loved her so much, more than anything it just made me feel sad. It was like a part of him had died with her. I found myself wishing that he could move on. That was precisely why I had to get back on my feet as fast as possible and get over the grief of losing her, so that I could make things better for Dad. We couldn’t both be stuck in this well of sadness. And what should I say when someone asked whether I missed Mom? Whether I was sad she was gone? I honestly had no idea what to say because deep down, I believed it was my duty and responsibility to pull myself together and carry on.