

MOUNT
E·M·I·L·Y

LOW YING PING



a novel

Mount Emily



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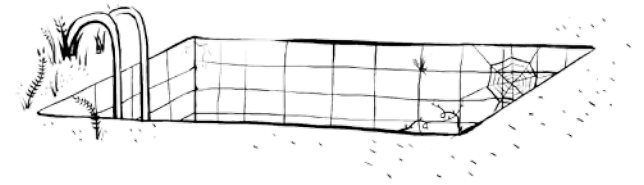
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For my dearest daughter



chapter one

Patsy Goh could not believe how infuriating her mother was being. What was the big deal about a sleepover? *Aren't I already in Secondary One, and almost 13?* she thought. All her friends went for sleepovers, so why couldn't she too? And it wasn't as if she had wanted to go to some random friend's house. It was the house of Elena Tan—her best friend since forever.

She was still fuming when she arrived at school and made it to the assembly point just as the bell rang. Elena, who stood behind her during morning assembly,

nudged her and whispered, “Hey, what’s wrong? Even your hair’s on fire.”

Patsy smoothed down her unruly, wiry hair as best as she could with irritation. She hated the messy way she looked, but somehow found it nearly impossible to remember to brush her hair; when she did remember, she would invariably be running late and not have the time to do it. She would end up just scrunching the whole lot up in a sorry-looking ponytail. She glanced back at Elena. Her friend, who was totally unlike her, had a perfectly straight parting at one side of her head, and her jet-black hair fell neatly down before curling obediently at just the right angle above her shoulders.

Patsy heaved a deep sigh that meant “everything’s wrong today”, and Elena quietly neatened the pleats of Patsy’s pinafore from the back in a show of sympathy.

The two girls attended Mount Emily Girls’ School, affectionately called “Mount Em” by its students. The school derived its name from being located on Mount Emily Road, which bordered on the picturesque Mount Emily Park. Founded nearly a hundred years ago by missionaries who had come to Singapore, the school building was old and rather run-down, but also spacious, with lots of greenery. Thirty years earlier, their mothers had attended the very same school. In fact,

their mothers had been classmates and good friends too. This was what made the bond between the two girls all the more special. No one else in school had a history as long as they did. Patsy liked to think that their friendship had practically been fated.

That morning, old Mrs Kwek’s science lesson seemed to go on forever. Patsy tried to keep herself from nodding off by trying to figure out if Mrs Kwek’s beehive-like bun of hair was real. At long last, the recess bell rang and Patsy jumped at the chance to talk to Elena.

“I said, ‘Why can’t I sleep over at Elena’s next Friday?’” Patsy recounted, her voice growing louder and louder as she became increasingly agitated, “And she said, ‘You know the eighth of August is my best friend’s death anniversary and your dad isn’t free so I need you to come with me to visit her grave and why must you do your sleepover that day anyway,’ and I said, ‘Because that’s when all of Elena’s other friends can make it,’ and she said, ‘Why do you need to sleep at somebody else’s house when you have your own house,’ and I said, ‘Everybody does sleepovers and I’m already almost 13,’ and she said, ‘You’re not everybody!’”

“Okay, okay,” Elena said soothingly. “Don’t get so worked up.”

"I'm not worked up!"

"Fine, fine. Why don't you let your mum cool off and ask her again in a few days? Or maybe I could ask my mum to ask her?"

"You'd do that?" Patsy asked hopefully and a little doubtfully.

"Yes, yes. Anyway, don't be angry anymore. We still have 20 minutes of recess left. Let me show you something interesting."

"Hmm?" Patsy asked warily. She hoped it wasn't anything too adventurous. The last time Elena had said that, she had made Patsy go with her to Mount Emily Park at dusk so that they could investigate the abandoned wooden shack at the far end of it. The park with a view of the city area beneath the hill was a delight to be in during the day, but at twilight took on a sinister aspect. Mindful of the rumours that ghosts haunted the area around the old Mount Emily swimming pool nearby, where drownings had occurred long ago, Patsy had been terrified they would encounter a spectre and prove once and for all that ghosts exist, or, a lesser evil but horrifying nonetheless, come upon a poisonous snake. In some remote corner of her mind, she even feared that Mrs Kwek might suddenly rise up from the grassy shadows to glare at them over her

thick glasses. In the end, all they found at the shack were empty bottles of beer and a strong smell of piss.

"Where are we going?" Patsy asked as she allowed Elena to lead her away from their classroom and down several flights of stairs.

Elena looked furtively around, then whispered, "You've heard about the ghost of Mount Em, right?"

Patsy groaned. "That old story about how a girl vanished into thin air? You mean you believe that load of rubbish?"

"What load of rubbish?" Elena chided. "It's a well-respected legend, all right? It's been around for decades and lots of people have seen the ghost."

"Like who?" Patsy challenged.

"I don't know anyone myself," Elena admitted, "but I'm sure people have seen it. Otherwise where would the legend have come from?"

By then, they had arrived at the part of the school that housed the science laboratories. Patsy shuddered as they walked past the chemistry lab with the real skeleton standing sentry just inside the open door. This part of the school was usually quiet when no lab lessons were going on and it gave her the creeps.

Elena led Patsy down one final flight of stairs at the end of the science corridor. "Here we are!"

“No ghost to be seen,” Patsy declared loudly, making a show of looking around. In front of her was just another corridor running parallel to the science corridor above. There were two storerooms on this level, but nothing else of interest.

Elena rolled her eyes. “Not so easy. Follow me.” She walked past the storerooms, then, to Patsy’s horror, proceeded to climb over the railing at the end of the corridor. She was heading, Patsy realised, for the slope located just beyond the storerooms.

Mount Emily Girls’ School was built on a hill and there were a number of corridors in the school that ran over exposed slopes. Some persistent grass tried to grow on these slopes, but the lack of sunlight prevented them from flourishing, resulting in despondent tufts of dusty green interspersed with patches of brown soil. Elena had brought Patsy to one such slope. Reluctantly, Patsy followed Elena to scramble over the railing, which rather ruffled Patsy’s law-abiding conscience.

“I hope that’s the only illegal thing we’re going to do today,” she murmured, glancing around nervously.

“Not at all,” Elena said brightly. “We’re going to dig!”

“What?!” Patsy stared at Elena, then turned to goggle at the slope. It was inclined at an angle of about

45 degrees and stretched for about five metres before tapering off to a sort of narrow landing. A short stretch of wall connected the landing with the ceiling, above which was the science corridor. Another wall closed off the top half of the slope on the side nearest the railing. On the other side, the slope ran on for a good distance before hitting a wall at the far end and an open walkway at the top of the slope. Away from the gloom of the science corridor, the grass here could flourish under the open sky and was a lush carpet of green.

The lighting at the slope under the corridor was rather dim but amid the shadows Patsy could make out the dry soil and clumps of bedraggled grass that littered the slope.

“As the legend goes, this is where the ghost was seen, right?” Elena asked.

Patsy nodded, feeling her flesh tingle a little as she remembered the stories their seniors had told them during Orientation Week. “What’s that got to do with digging though?”

“Don’t you know? The body of the girl was buried here, right at the top of this slope, and today, we’re going to find the body!” Elena announced with a flourish.

“I’ve never heard of that part of the legend before,” Patsy said suspiciously. “Did you make it up yourself?”

“Oh, you never hear of anything,” Elena said carelessly, hitching up the skirt of her pinafore and starting to climb the slope. Patsy’s cheeks burned. She knew Elena was not deliberately trying to be mean, but didn’t she know how hurtful her words could be?

Patsy hesitated, then got onto her hands as well and crawled after Elena. The soil was grubby and she didn’t like the feeling of the half-dead grass on her fingers, but she continued on. “We can’t dig, though,” she said as she neared the top. “We’ve got no tools.”

Elena was already squatting at the top, hunched over to avoid hitting her head against the underside of the corridor. She produced a small metal ruler from her pocket and pried tentatively at the soil. “You’re right, the soil is too hard.”

Patsy was about to breathe a sigh of relief when a voice called up to them from a distance. “Are you two *digging?*”

Elena and Patsy looked down. No one was there.



chapter two

Patsy felt a shiver go up her spine, then she spotted a girl standing just beyond the railing they had climbed over. Ordinarily, the walls and ceilings of this part of the school building would have obscured the girls from the view of passers-by, but now Patsy could see a girl peering up at them. She must have bent down to pick up something she had dropped, for she was now squatting and looking through the bars of the railing. Patsy could tell she was a prefect, from her tie. “Are you digging?” the prefect asked again.

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About the Author



Low Ying Ping practically grew up in CHIJ St Nicholas Girls’ School, which she attended from pre-primary to secondary 4. She has always been fascinated by the dynamics of the friendship between girls, and the fact that many of these become lifelong bonds. She holds a Master’s degree in English Literature from the University of Warwick, UK. Her poems have appeared in *Singa*, the journal of the National University of Singapore Centre for the Arts; and *QLRS (Quarterly Literary Review Singapore)*. *Mount Emily* is her debut novel.

Watch out for the second book
in the Mount Emily series:

Mount Emily Revisited



Patsy Goh and her best friend Elena Tan
have travelled back in time again. Now, they're
on a mission to save Charlotte Pang and her mum,
who've been kidnapped by a Midnight Warrior.

Mount Emily Revisited
will be out later in 2016.

Patsy Goh travels back in time to 1987...and she's trapped in her mother's body!

What happens when 13-year-old Patsy Goh and her best friend Elena Tan are whisked back in time to 1987? Against a ticking clock, they race to hunt down the magical time crystal that got them into this mess in the first place, before the evil Midnight Warriors find it and cause a time crisis that could destroy existence. Will Patsy and Elena be able to overcome their differences in order to save the world? And to make things trickier, they have to do all this while trapped in their mums' 13-year-old bodies.



"I found this a riveting read. A complex story vividly told!"

TAN TER CHEAH, author of *One*

"The story displays a keen sensitivity to human relationships, and will appeal to children, teens and the young at heart."

HUANG JINFANG, English Language teacher and mother of two

"My favourite part is when the characters from the present meet the people from the past. I truly enjoyed this read."

HEIDI, 12, Ai Tong School

"Brilliantly plotted, its unique storyline will have you reading it again and again."

JONI, 12, SOTA (School of the Arts)

"The story is very entertaining."

HANNAH, 10, CHIJ St Nicholas Girls' School

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