



Ms Ice Sandwich

Mieko Kawakami , Louise Heal Kawai (Translator)

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A boy is obsessed with a woman who sells sandwiches. He goes to the supermarket almost every day, just so he can look at her face. She is beautiful to him, and he calls her "Ms Ice Sandwich", and endlessly draws her portrait.

But the boy's friend hears about this hesitant adoration, and suddenly everything changes. His visits to Ms Ice Sandwich stop, and with them the last hopes of his childhood.

A moving and surprisingly funny tale of growing up and learning how to lose, *Ms Ice Sandwich* is Mieko Kawakami at her very best.

Ms Ice Sandwich Details

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Author : Mieko Kawakami , Louise Heal Kawai (Translator)

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From Reader Review Ms Ice Sandwich for online ebook

Ryan says

I'm continuing my streak of reading Japanese books this year. I couldn't resist this cover, and it's a short little book. I thought I could finish it last weekend, but life and work got in the way so I just finished it this morning.

The narrator is an unnamed Japanese boy who is obsessed with the woman who sells him sandwiches every day. The boy lives with his mother and his father's mother, but his father passed away when he was four. He struggles with school, friendship, connection. Everyday he goes to the grocery store and the woman behind the counter uses her small silver tongs to pull out sandwiches and place them in sacks. He's intrigued by her light blue eyes, the color of ice. He becomes distraught when he hears other classmates, especially three popular girls, mocking the woman, claiming she had plastic surgery and an ugly face.

This isn't a story about love, and it's not creepy. The novel explores a phenomenon that only happens when we are young. We become interested, infatuated with different people, objects, and activities. We don't always have the self-awareness to know why we feel the way we do, but the feelings are strong. The relationship between the narrator and the object of his fascination has the intensity of a crush, but isn't sexual. The narrator isn't creepy, he's awkward and unsure of himself. In ninety pages, we are exposed to a developed world with complicated characters, and churning emotions, while the character deal with loss and connection. I highly recommend this novella to open minds, and broaden perspective of new cultures.

Trade Paperback • Fiction - Literary, Novella, Japanese • ?????????? • Found online and purchased through book depository.??

Sudeepta Pradhan (booksteaandmore) says

Ms. Ice sandwich by Mieko Kawakami is a Japanese novella translated by Louise Heal Kawai. It follows the story of an unnamed 4th grader who lives with his mother and grandmother. The story is narrated from the first person perspective of this 8-year-old boy. As he visits the grocery store he often sees this woman who sells sandwich but is reticent and aloof and does not interact with any customers. She makes sandwich and packs it with mechanical precision. She has ice blue eyelids and our protagonist is enchanted by her. He looks forward to his mother asking him to run errands to the grocery store as this allows him to see her.

In school, he has a friend Tutti who lives with her father. Tutti loves watching movies with her father and though she is a child her maturity seems adult-like.

Our protagonist continues to be smitten by the sandwich lady but one day he hears some students in his class talking about her looks in a demeaning way. He then has a kind of doubt if his adoration for her is correct.

This is a tale of first love, of loss and the need to have closure. Though at the surface it looks like a simple tale for me as a reader I could find a deeper context in the tale. I found the author trying to dispel popular beliefs on gender like girls like to play with dolls and watch romantic flicks while boys love action flicks. It showed me how loss can often help one gain a maturity early on in life. At last one lingering thought I had in my mind post reading this was how when we are children our notions of beauty is unadulterated but as we grow up the standards that society dictates in terms of beauty and looks makes us doubt if what we see as beautiful is really pretty or not.

Chris says

Incredible. *EXPERTLY* translated (and I know I'm very particular, I can't help it - see my review of Dandelions ???). I devoured this sandwich hungrily and it was delicious, thank you very much. Ms Ice Sandwich was exactly what I needed when I needed it. I've never laughed so hard and felt such loss in the span of, what, two pages? toward the end.

What an interesting book.

It's not every generation that we have a translator who can climb inside the psyche of the writer and expose the writer's perspective, style, and tone without creating a barrier that reflects the translator's own mind to the reader thereby distorting the writer's work. In this way, Louise Heal Kawai reminds me of Seidensticker. But in many ways, I get the feeling that Kawai might be in a league all her own. I intend (and am very excited) to read each of Kawai's translations. I'd recommend that you do the same.

Supreeth says

I googled 'Japanese novellas' and it came up with these new Pushkin press Japanese novellas. I picked this one first 'cause this one was shortest of all. I'm not the sort of person to use words like cute, sweet and all that, but this was that. The writing in this book is really childish, but again the narrator is fourth grader, so it just works fine. Blurb promises *lost innocence* and *loss*, but it's not that deep. It's simply, you know, well, cute I guess. And sweet.

Katie Lumsden says

I really loved this - so impactful for such a short book! It really lovingly and warmly looks at grief, growing up and friendship. I would highly recommend!

Anupama C K(b0rn_2_read) says

3.5 stars

Shubhi Nigam says

My very first from Japanese literature. Thoroughly enjoyed the read!

Pop Bop says

Packs A Lot Into A Small Package

This mid-length novella has a lot of moving parts, but they all fit together exceptionally well.

Our narrator is a young boy. He is precise, observant, and thoughtful. He is clearly a talented artist, although this is not featured. He's also a touch compulsive, but this tends to be downplayed as well. He is often awkward and tongue tied, but while this plays out in his social interactions it does not interrupt his insightful and rather charming interior monologue, which is the main narrative force.

So, what do we learn from this awkward, precocious, and generally good hearted boy? Well, he has a crush on a woman who works at his local market. She sells premade sandwiches, (he thinks of her as Ms. Ice Sandwich), and he worships her from afar. Our hero also comes to know a girl from his class at school, and we follow his tentative attempts to forge a relationship with her, even though he doesn't quite realize that's what he's doing. (Of course she knows, and we get to see the girl's coming of age through our hero's eyes). Add to that an oddly distant relationship with the boy's Mom, a touching relationship with an elderly Grandma, and a few other lifetime bumps and bruises, and that gives you a sense of where this book goes.

The narrative is low-key, restrained, and not particularly writerly. The boy is treated with affection and gentleness, and the insights he gains are mild but feel authentic. There is drama, reflection, humor, and a touching humanity that informs the entire book. There are a number of sly and witty deadpan throwaway lines that seem pretty advanced for our boy hero, but I was happy to overlook that in light of the overall appeal of the narrative. So, bottom line, this was a restrained and satisfying treat that went on just long enough without overstaying its welcome or straining its premise. A nice, mellow find.

(Please note that I received a free advance copy of this book without a review requirement, or any influence regarding review content should I choose to post a review. Apart from that I have no connection at all to either the author or the publisher of this book.)

Sharlene says

A rather strange book about a young boy who becomes infatuated (obsessed?) with the woman who sells sandwiches at the local store. There's this undertone of sadness and longing throughout.

I hadn't heard of this book or its author before. But the title and the fun cover caught my eye while I was browsing my library's Libby catalogue.

It's a coming of age novella, a story about growing up and feeling different and learning to cope with all these strange new emotions and feelings.

Kind of moving, in that subtle and quirky Japanese way.

Kirsty says

Ms Ice Sandwich is a quirky and immediately engaging novella, about a young boy's obsession with a woman who sells sandwiches from a counter in his local supermarket. As a character study, it is very interesting indeed from both sides. I enjoyed the almost stream-of-consciousness way in which the book was written, and overall, found it rather a thought-provoking story. The real strength here is the way in which

Kawakami presents naivety and growing up.

Akylina says

The second book from Pushkin Press's Japanese Novellas series which I am going to review today is *Ms Ice Sandwich* by Kawakami Mieko (yes, she shares the same last name as Kawakami Hiromi whose *Record of a Night Too Brief* I reviewed last week, but the two authors have no relation whatsoever as far as I am concerned).

I had never read anything by Kawakami Mieko before, but I have to admit that this novella caught my interest from the outset. It might have been very brief and left me yearning for more, but I developed an instant liking to her quirky yet utterly captivating writing style.

The story revolves around a young boy whose name and exact age are never really revealed (I'm guessing he's a junior high schooler but I could be wrong), who has fallen in love with the lady who makes and sells sandwiches at the supermarket. His innocent infatuation drives him to visit her sandwich stand every so often just so he can catch a glimpse of her face. When he describes the lady, he places specific emphasis on the beautiful characteristics of her face and her "ice-blue eyelids" which earned her the nickname Ms Ice Sandwich.

The only people who know about the boy's infatuation are his grandma, who is stuck in her bed, unable to move and to whom the protagonist often entrusts his deepest thoughts and feelings, and his best friend from school, Tutti, with who he seems to start developing a deeper relationship as the story progresses. During one of the boy's visits to Ms Ice Sandwich, he hears one of her customers shouting ugly words at her about her face, which he also happens to overhear from some of his female classmates the day after the event. The author does not really spend any time weaving a mystery around the lady's face (something which I rather expected to happen), she chooses to focus on the boy's feelings and perceptions of the woman instead.

Ultimately, this is not at all a love story and it was never supposed to be one. Instead, it is a fascinating, touching and quiet coming-of-age story with a plethora of lessons to be taught and inspiring passages. One of my favourites was from Tutti's motivational speech to our protagonist:

If you want to see somebody you have to make plans to meet, or even make plans to make plans, and next thing you end up not seeing them anymore. That's what's going to happen. If you don't see somebody, you end up never seeing them. And then there's going to be nothing left of them at all.

Another issue this short novella tackles is, of course, difference and how people and the society deal with people who are "different". While I felt that the author could have expanded a lot more on this issue rather than just leaving it as a side-issue, perhaps nothing more was needed to be said. One thing I have definitely learned from reading Japanese literature is that, sometimes, subtlety is much more powerful.

That brings me to the last thing I want to discuss about this book. The translation was excellent and flowed very naturally, so very much so that at some point I forgot I was reading Japanese and not Anglophone literature. Not having read the original, I cannot know whether that was a feature of the original text itself or whether it was the translator's magic, but I was quite satisfied with it.

Overall, *Ms Ice Sandwich* is a very heart-warming and quiet novella about growing up, first love, loss and learning to cope with all these new feelings which inundate kids at that age all of a sudden. I would definitely recommend this to anyone with no exception, as you are certain to gain something upon reading it regardless of your literary preferences.

This book was provided to me by the publisher via NetGalley.

Tamsien West (Babbling Books) says

Gently endearing story about a young boy and his adoration for a lady who sells sandwiches. I almost gave this story a miss, expecting it to be about a teen boy's sexual awakening. But I was delighted to discover it is a tale far more innocent.

The unnamed protagonist is a 4th grader who finds excuses almost every day to visit the local supermarket to see 'Ms Ice Sandwich'. He never speaks to her beyond asking for a sandwich, so he gave her the name based on her job and the brilliant ice-blue eyes she has (or perhaps eye-shadow she wears). One day he overhears some classmates talking about her, and mocking her appearance, the same appearance he has been so enchanted by. This shakes up his perspective, unsettling him. The rest of the novella explores his friendship with a classmate, his love for his grandma, and his decision about how to revisit Ms Ice Sandwich.

The whole book is told in an almost stream-of-consciousness style, using innocent language and being very true to the childish perspective on the world that the protagonist has. It's a balance between naivety and clear-eyed insight that so many children possess and Kawakami has captured it wonderfully.

Puck says

2018 is the year I've fallen in love with novella's: I've read many great ones this year and Ms Ice Sandwich is maybe the best one so far. Only look at its funky cover: that already promises something good.

But the story itself is more gentle than funky. In it we learn about the innocent life of an 8-year old Japanese boy. He goes to school, spend time with his sick grandma, but mostly he tells us about Ms Ice Sandwich, the cool sandwich lady with her ice-blue eyelids (eyeshadow?)

However, when he hears his classmates comment about Ms Ice Sandwich, his fascination wavers. Is he stupid to find her cool?

"Like when you're holding a cat and touch its soft belly. Or when a blanket brushes the top of your feet. As I stand gazing at Ms Ice Sandwich, all of these things are happening to me."

The plot itself might seem simple, but Mieko Kawakami succeeded in making the narrator's voice a great balance of childish naivety and clear insight. Especially his conversation with his classmate Tutti surprised me with its emotional message.

In a way, this book feels like a Ghibli movie. No, not because the author is Japanese, but because the main character and the whole novel carry a 'Ghibli' feeling of hope with it that I absolutely loved.

A bit bittersweet, but overall a touching and joyful story - in less than 100 pages! What a wonderful surprise. :)

Matthew Sciarappa says

An utter delight.

Simple. Sweet. And lacking the fussiness of so many other novellas.

Tink Magoo is bad at reviews says

1.5 stars

I enjoyed the bumbling narrative but I'm either too thick to 'get' this or it just didn't translate into the humorous love story it was supposed to, for me at least.
