

CHRISTMAS

MISTAKEN

IDENTITY

by

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Christmas Mistaken Identity

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Plot Summary

Grace and Ryan met online in junior high on a fan website. Instantly hitting it off, they made a pact to never talk by phone, only by written communication, so they've never heard each other's voices. They don't even know each other's last names, so they could never Google each other, either.

The one thing they have done besides email almost daily over the past 12 years is to send photos. But being birds of a feather, both of them felt too inferior and shy in junior high to send their real photos. Instead, they each sent photos of their good looking best friends instead of themselves. And to keep up the charade, both have continued to send photos of their friends. After all, what's the harm? It's not like they would ever meet in person.

That is, until Ryan lands his dream job that will coincidentally take him to Grace's city for 4 days. Both Grace and Ryan have long since grown out of their awkward youth phases. Grace is beyond pretty, but still thinks of herself as that acne prone girl with the braces. Ryan is handsome, but can't shake the feeling he's still a scrawny kid getting picked last for dodge ball. And after all the years of sending their friends photos instead of their own, both Grace and Ryan are too ashamed to meet each other. And so they ask their best friends Hannah and Josh to stand in for them, both thinking their friend is meeting with the real pen pal.

Upon meeting, Hannah and Josh try to remember all the details they should know about each other, but repeatedly goof up, making for some good comedy. Unable to pretend to be someone else, their true personalities start to shine through, and much to the horror of Ryan and Grace they begin falling for each other.

Adding to the complications is Ryan's boss, whose company is about to go public. That is, IF Grace doesn't blow the IPO sky high by unearthing the secret Ryan's boss is hiding.

Characters

Grace

Lives in Madison, Wisconsin, grew up on a dairy farm and moved to the big city of Madison when she attended college. Grace is a hopeless romantic lacking in confidence and totally unaware of just how cute, funny and intelligent she really is. For the last 12 years she's been writing to someone name Ryan, whom she met on the Internet at a fan site when she was in junior high. They made a pact to never talk by phone, so they only write emails and texts, with the occasional card or snail mail letter for the fun of it. They have traded pictures over the years. Ryan is one of only two people Grace confides in, the other being her best friend Hannah.

Grace is a newspaper reporter who's been stuck writing classifieds and ad copy for the past year. But now she finally gets her first real story – reporting on how wonderful this guru is at helping people at Christmas time, because as her editor says, people eat this feel good stuff up. But Grace smells a bigger story – that the guru is possibly not the amazing guy people think he is.

Ryan

Living in California, Ryan is a very intelligent guy who gets super tongue tied anytime he's around a pretty girl. In fact, his dating life is kinda sad. He's a great guy, funny, good looking but not drop dead handsome, loyal to a fault, and completely lacking in confidence. He's been writing to Grace for 12 years now, and he secretly harbors a fantasy that she's the gal for him. In fact, he's fallen in love with her letters, and wonders if he would fall in love with her, given the chance.

Ryan just got a job as the road manager for a self-help psychologist, who is about to give a 4 day seminar in Madison, Wisconsin on how to get through the holidays if you hate them, and make the holidays unforgettable if you already love them. Ryan actually interviewed for the position six months earlier, and was turned down only because of his lack of experience and young age. However, the person who got the job suddenly quit, and so Ryan was called in at the last moment. This job is a real coup for someone as young as him and he doesn't want to blow it.

Hannah

Grace's best friend. They live in the same small apartment building in Madison, Wisconsin. But Hannah is Grace's opposite – very outgoing, positive, self-assured and ready to party at a

moment's notice.

Josh

Ryan's best friend and somewhat goofy guy. Again, he's seems to be Ryan's opposite in some ways. He can talk up a pretty girl with easy, he's very outgoing and he loves to do adventurous things just for the fun of it.

Buster Johnson

Grace's editor at the newspaper where she's been working for a year. Buster's priority is the newspaper and keeping the circulation up. To him, Grace is just another cog in the wheel, albeit a pretty one with potential talent.

Michael StClaire

A VERY well-known psychologist, author and motivational speaker, recently diagnosed with early stage Parkinson's and about to take his company public.

Chapters

Chapter 1 –

The book opens with Grace reading an email from Ryan, which says, “Guess what? Today is our anniversary – 12 years ago today we met online at that singer's fan site – did you hear? He just got out of rehab. Again.”

“Anyway, happy anniversary. It's pretty amazing that we've been friends like this for half our lives now. And I have some great news – I got that job I interviewed for 6 months ago that I wanted so bad. Seems the #1 choice didn't work out, and they called and asked if I could start right away. Imagine – I'm going to be the road manager for one of the biggest motivational psychologists in the country – how awesome is that?”

Then we switch to Grace writing back to Ryan: “I just broke up with that guy I was dating. Okay, he broke up with me. But it's alright – I can take back that present I bought him and get something good for myself – like a pound of fudge. Just kidding. This one won't be too hard to get over.”

Ryan writing to Grace: “Sorry about the break up, but I could tell you were way too good for that guy. I think about you all the time – I wonder if we'll ever meet?”

Grace to Ryan: “I don't know when, where or even if. But one thing is for sure – when I look at the night sky, I know you're looking at the same sky, and it makes me feel – not so alone. Until we meet under a blanket of stars, Grace.”

—————=—————

Grace works for a newspaper. Fresh out of college, she's been writing classifieds, longing for a big break. Just before Christmas, she gets called into the boss's office and he offers her a story. Grace is thrilled until she learns what the story is – the big motivational speaker Michael StClaire is coming to town to do a free 4 day seminar for anyone who has trouble getting through the holidays – healing their old holiday hurts and replacing those hurts with love and positive feelings – and she's to report on how wonderful it is. “People like warm gushy stuff like that,” says her boss Buster Johnson, “and they like self help and they love Christmas, so it should be an easy assignment.”

Grace tries to turn the story down – she knows Ryan will be there and she doesn't want to meet him. Well, she does, but she's afraid because she's never sent him her real picture, only pictures of her best friend.

The boss says fine, he'll give it to someone else, but she quickly changes her mind, realizing this could be her big break. So she takes the story.

Chapter 2 –

Ryan is on the plane with his best friend Josh. Ryan is wearing a sport coat and looking very reserved and quiet, his friend is the opposite, wearing a loud shirt, very outgoing. There are pretty girls in the next aisle, and Josh keeps flirting with them. Ryan asks how he can be so free and easy with women – when he tries to talk, he just freezes up and gets tongue tied.

Hannah is picking up her very pregnant dog from Grace, who was dog sitting. Hannah asks if Grace can babysit the dog tomorrow evening, but Grace says she can't. Hannah gets excited, thinking Grace has a date, but Grace explains she actually got an assignment.

Hannah asks why Grace is so glum about an assignment, and Grace says that “Ryan is going to be there.” “Ryan? YOUR Ryan?” Hannah is totally excited because she believes Ryan is in love with Grace. Grace doesn't believe it. Hannah gets Grace to read a couple of the letters Ryan sent (Grace has printed out and saved all of them in 3 big boxes) to prove her point, but Grace just doesn't see it.

Back to Ryan and Josh on the plane, Josh is confessing how worried he is about meeting Grace, and Josh tries to bolster him up. Finally Josh says, “She's going to take one look at you, and she'll know right then, she'll KNOW.” And Ryan says, “Yes, that's what I'm afraid of,” but it goes right over Josh's head as he's again flirting with and then joining the ladies across the aisle.

Ryan pulls out a very well worn photo from his pocket and looks at it – a photo of Hannah, not Grace. This is the first time the reader realizes that something is up – Grace has sent pictures of Hannah, not of herself.

Back to Grace and Hannah, Hannah is finishing reading another letter, (letters are scattered all over the table, there are two wine glasses half full and a nearly empty bottle of wine) and she reads: “...until we meet under a blanket of stars...”

And Grace says that's always the way they sign off, ever since they first started writing.

Hannah's all excited, talking about how romantic the whole thing is, two people writing across the miles of time and space for half their lifetimes, finally destined to meet.

But Grace is trying to tell Hannah how worried she is, that people never turn out how you think they will, how writing is one thing, meeting is another, how he might totally disappoint her, or more likely, she could totally disappoint him, and how would she live with that, etc.

Grace says she's not ready to let go of the fantasy, and Hannah asks, "So what are you going to do, stand him up? That's so wrong, you'll break his heart and this whole correspondence thing will never be the same. It's time to move forward, to meet each other. This is it. Otherwise all he has are picture of you."

Grace says that's the other thing she wanted to talk about – "I haven't actually sent pictures of me, I sent pictures of, well, pictures of you."

Hannah is shocked. "You sent what??"

Grace: "I know, I know it was stupid, but you remember what I looked like in junior high, I had braces and pimples and that terrible haircut my mom made me get over and over again and I just couldn't send him my picture. And yours looked so good that year, so I sent yours. And then I was stuck, so every year or two I would send a new picture of you."

Hannah: "And so you've got him swooning over this woman that doesn't even exist?"

Grace: "What are you talking about, you totally exist."

Hannah: "I know I exist, but the woman with MY face and YOUR personality doesn't exist!"

Grace: "I know, that's why I was thinking maybe you could... maybe... meet him... for me???"

Hannah says why she couldn't possibly pull it off, and Grace says why she could, because she's known her forever, and besides, Hannah owes her.

Hannah: "I owe you?"

Grace: "Yeah, for babysitting your dog that's about to pop puppies all over the place at any second and making me a nervous wreck. Hannah, please, it'll just be one night. You'll go to dinner, be charming, he'll be happy, I'll be happy..."

—————=—————

Ryan is in the motel room, lying awake in the dark, unable to sleep. What's he gonna do? Finally he gets up, walks to Josh's bed and wakes him up from a sound sleep. He says he can't see her, he can't go through it.

Josh says of course he can, she knows him better than anyone.

Ryan: "You don't understand, she hasn't actually seen me."

Josh: "She's already seen your picture, she's obviously okay with that, so you're cool."

Ryan: "But the pictures I've been sending haven't exactly been me. They've been... you."

—————=—————

Josh is waiting, anxious, calls Ryan. "Why am I doing this?"

Ryan: "Because you're my best friend, because you owe me, because I paid for this trip. This is why I brought you."

More conversation, ending with Ryan hanging up and face palming. "She's gonna think I'm a total numbnuts."

—————=—————

Ryan is with his new boss Michael at a mixer held before the seminar starts. Grace is there in her capacity as reporter, and has no idea who Ryan is but recognizes Michael. She over hears the two talking – Michael seems terribly worried about something and overhears the phrases, “if they find out” “in my condition” and “the IPO could be totally derailed if this gets out.” Grace smells a real story brewing. Is there a scam going on here? What does “in my condition” mean? Is he hooked on painkillers or something worse?

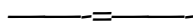
Michael gets pulled into another conversation, and Grace says hi to him, “I couldn't help overhearing your conversation, etc.” Ryan doesn't know she's a reporter, and wonders why she's being so nosey. He doesn't tell her anything.

He takes a call and she overhears more, something about IPO regs and Ryan saying he can't control what Michael does. She thinks Ryan is talking about a drinking or substance abuse problem, and doesn't realize Michael has just been diagnosed with early stage Parkinson's disease. Ryan realizes Grace was listening to the whole conversation he just had on the phone. He thinks she knows the truth and doesn't realize what she really thinks. Ryan says “she shouldn't have overheard that,” and walks away from her.

Chapter 3 -

Josh sees Hannah approaching from the distance; she's reading from a crib sheet but he doesn't know that. What he does know is she's totally hot. They immediately become awkward upon meeting, because they're both pretending to be someone else but they're not very good at it. This is a great place to insert some humor and misunderstanding, since they are both very sketchy on the details of each others lives but are pretending like they know all about each other.

She asks about his job, and he totally doesn't know what to say. She asks if he wants to see the sites, and he says they should be at the seminar, but then quickly blows it off.



Grace is on the phone with her editor, telling him she thinks she has a really big story that this Michael StClaire is on drugs or something – imagine the implications, especially with the big IPO coming up. Imagine when shareholders find out about this.

She turns and there's Ryan, listening to her conversation. “You're a reporter?” He's pissed and walks away, knowing she has the wrong story but unable to set the record straight.

Chapter 4 -

Michael and Ryan are walking and talking about the biz, and Michael says hiring him was a great decision. Then he tells Ryan that any bad publicity or any news about his Parkinsons could

seriously jeopardize the IPO. Ryan is really miserable. “This can't be happening” he says to himself.

Josh and Hannah are on their date, walking down the street, and there are carolers and all things Christmas like. He says she must be loving it, because he knows that Grace loves Christmas, but Hannah really doesn't like it. Josh takes her to a coffee shop and as they're talking they each become more and more themselves, even though they're still pretending to be their friends. But there still some funny moments, too, when they get details about each other totally wrong. They both check notes when the other isn't looking, trying to think of things to say or say the things they should be saying if they were who they were pretending to be.

When Hannah finally returns from the date, Grace is petting the pregnant dog, fighting jealously. Hannah reminds her this was her idea, and tells her Ryan asked her out again for tomorrow night. Hannah is torn – she likes Ryan, but her allegiance is to Grace, and she tries to talk Grace into coming clean with Ryan, but she refuses.

Josh and the real Ryan are back at the hotel room, and Josh is telling him he asked Grace out again. They start arguing because Ryan is jealous and on top of that, he doesn't like the way this is going – Josh isn't acting like Ryan would. Finally Josh offers to make a move for Ryan, and Ryan firmly says no. “If you start acting like yourself, she'll think I'm a complete jerk.”

Josh calls Hannah and tells her that he had a really great time. Grace is listening to Hannah's end of the conversation. When Hannah hangs up, Grace asks how Ryan got her number, and Hannah tells her she gave it to him. “Did you really think this whole no phoning was going to work once you met?” Grace is crestfallen: “It's just that we just had our first phone call and I wasn't even on it.”

Chapter 5 -

Hannah meets Josh for their next date, calling “Ryan!” as she approaches. But Josh doesn't respond until she finally touches him on the shoulder and he turns around. Grace, who followed Hannah, hides behind something and watches the scene. Ryan is there, too, watching and getting annoyed at Josh's incompetence at playing the role of Ryan.

Josh takes Hannah to a scary movie. They're eating popcorn when Hannah says, “You know it's funny. It's like yesterday we had nothing in common, and tonight...” Josh says, “Tonight it's like

we've known each other our whole lives.” Clearly they are falling for each other.

Also in the theater, seated well apart from each other and not aware of each other, are the real Ryan and Grace, both watching the couple, both wishing they'd had the guts to fess up and tell the other one that they are the real deal.

Josh and Hannah kiss – shy at first, just a small kiss. But they both enjoy it so much that they kiss again, long and passionate, and then look into each others eyes with surprise at how good the kiss was.

Ryan and Grace are both upset, and each of them makes a dash to leave the theater. Outside, Grace is slumped against the wall just outside the door, not knowing what to do, when Ryan comes dashing through the door and nearly collides with her. They look at each other and with a spark of recognition, both of them say, “It's you!”

Grace says, “I tried looking for you after the seminar.”

Ryan: “Yeah, well, I left, just like I'm about to do right now. Good night.”

Grace chases Ryan down. “Wait! I really gotta talk to you about Michael and the company. Is he having a difficulty? I mean, is he, you know, hooked on something?”

Ryan: “No, no, it's nothing like that at all.”

Grace is looking distracted.

Ryan: “Are you looking for someone?”

Grace: Yeah, I'm looking for a friend. And an ex-friend. Oh, never mind.”

Josh and Hannah come out of the theater, looking quite happy and talking about the movie as they walk by. They don't even see Ryan and Grace, who have pulled back behind a tree.

Grace: “Look at them. He doesn't even know her. I mean, after 12 years, you would think he would know it wasn't even me.”

Ryan is shocked. He realizes this is in fact the REAL Grace he's talking to, not the other woman who looks like the pictures he's received over the years.

Grace keeps talking, but Ryan is utterly speechless, looking at Grace like it's the first time he's ever seen her.

Finally Grace apologizes. “I'm sorry, I'm not normally this dramatic. Or crazy sounding. I'm Grace. Grace Stapleton.” And they shake hands while Ryan says, “It's so very nice to meet you.” Grace asks Ryan's name, but all he can think of is to say “Josh.”

Grace asks Josh to coffee, where she spills the whole story of how she had this pen pal, but didn't send her own photo and then couldn't finally meet him. But Ryan doesn't tell Grace the truth yet, even though he wants to, because he's too afraid and nervous.

Walking home Ryan asks Grace out, but she says no, saying he's a great guy but she's carrying a torch for someone she's never even met, but she'll see him tomorrow at the seminar. Then at the last moment she says yes, but only if she can interview him for the story she's doing.

Chapter 6 -

Ryan is confronting Josh about the kiss, while simultaneously (else where) Grace is confronting Hannah about the kiss. But the two scenes end differently, because now Ryan knows who the real Grace is, so he gives Josh his blessing without telling him why, which totally blows Josh's mind. Josh is happy he's been given the green light to pursue Hannah, but wonders too what's up with that.

Meanwhile Grace still doesn't know that Josh isn't Ryan and Ryan isn't Josh, and she's totally mad with Hannah and even more mad at herself for what happened. Grace tells Hannah she's going to tell him the truth, and Hannah immediately says "NO!" and then finds an excuse of why she shouldn't do that. Clearly Hannah has fallen for Josh.

Josh calls to ask Hannah out, and Hannah asks Grace what she should do. Grace is totally confused on what to say, and finally relents when Hannah asks if she should tell him she's busy, and Grace says she would never do that to him.

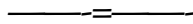
The dog is pacing back and forth as Hannah and Grace are talking, very restlessly.

Chapter 7 -

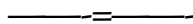
Grace is at work and her editor asks how her scoop of a story is going, and she says great! Not really meaning it. And her editor says wonderful, they're counting on her.

Ryan calls Grace and asks if she will help him pick out a tree on their date (even though he's staying at a hotel, but he knows Grace loves Christmas.) Grace thinks it's a weird thing for a date but relents.

Josh wonders why Ryan is in such a great mood, and is even more mystified when Ryan tells him to have a terrific time on his date with 'Grace.'



Grace and Ryan are on their date when Grace suggests they get the interview portion over with, so she asks about Michael's drug habits, and he convinces her he doesn't have one. Rather, the problem is early onset Parkinson's, and if she reveals this, it could ruin everything. Michael could still function as a motivational speaker and psychologist for years, and still help hundreds of thousands of people through his company, but not if the story got out and the IPO was ruined. As they're in the tree lot and Grace is done asking her questions, she sees Josh and thinks it's a sign that she should come clean to 'Ryan,' but the real Ryan talks her out of it, and they finish their date, falling more and more for each other.



Still thinking that Hannah is Grace, who loves Christmas, Josh has bought Hannah a Christmas gift of a santa hat with bells, which she hates but pretends to love because she realizing he did it because he cares so much and wants to make her happy.

Afterwards, Hannah is showing her hat to Grace, and Grace wants to keep it for herself because she's the one who loves Christmas and she still wants 'Ryan' who is really Josh. Grace tells Hannah about 'Josh,' who she says is just a friend. Hannah confesses to having kissed 'Ryan' several times. Grace is devastated but decides not to tell Ryan the truth, since he's having such a good time with Hannah.

Meanwhile, real Ryan is debating what to do. If he tells Grace, who is about to print a story about his boss, he could lose his dream job. But if he doesn't tell her, he risks losing her.

Chapter 8 -

Hannah and Josh are making out in her apartment, where it looks like Christmas has thrown up all over the place. Everything is covered in Christmas decorations and there's a giant tree fully decked out, all courtesy of Josh who still thinks he's with Grace who loves Christmas, not Hannah who hates Christmas. That's a knock on the door, and Hannah goes to the door while trying to straighten out her clothes.

It's Grace, who is stunned at all the decorations. Hannah tries to get her to go away, but Josh comes to the door and introduces himself as Ryan to “Hannah, 'Grace's' neighbor.

Grace asks Hannah to come to her apartment to talk, where real Ryan is knocking on the door. Ryan is returning her sweater which she forgot on their date. Ryan wants to talk, but Grace asks if it can wait because she wants to talk to Hannah about what's going on with fake Ryan. Ryan steps around the corner but pauses to listen to the conversation.

Hannah and Grace argue, Hannah wondering why Grace is spending so much time with 'Josh' if she's so into 'Ryan,' Grace feeling very confused about her feelings for the pen pal and for the guy she just met. Grace confesses feelings for Josh, which Ryan overhears, and Hannah confesses she's falling in love with Ryan, which just about breaks Grace's heart.

Chapter 9 -

Ryan is having breakfast with Michael, and Michael asks if he's seen the article. Ryan just about panics but Michael goes on to say it's a great article, it made them look good and didn't poke fun at their self-help psychology like some papers do. Ryan is so relieved he's thrilled.

Ryan realizes that Grace didn't print the story about Michael having Parkinsons because she was protecting him as Josh, not as Ryan. Which makes Ryan realize that she has fallen for him for sure.

Grace gets called into the Buster's office. He says the story isn't bad, but what happened to the hot story she told him about? She says there wasn't a story, nothing she could verify, so he demotes her, only this time instead of classifieds she's on obituaries.

Chapter 10 -

Josh and Hannah are in her apartment, telling momma dog how good she did and admiring the brand new puppies that were just born. It's a tender sweet moment for the couple, falling in love and seeing all this newborn life. Hannah realizes she hasn't eaten all day. There's no food and she doesn't want to go out and leave the dog for long, so Hannah takes Josh to Grace's apartment where there's food, but Josh decides Hannah is what he wants, and he takes her in his arms.

Grace is walking home and sees a giant Christmas tree outside her stoop. Ryan put it there, as a thank you for the story. He confronts her about how she feels about him and about how she feels about penpal Ryan. She says she loves 'Ryan,' but says it's crazy, can she love someone she hasn't spent a minute with? She feels like she has to choose between the two of them, and she loves penpal Ryan just a little bit more.

Grace and Ryan go to her apartment to talk, and she finds Hannah and Josh making out on the kitchen table. She runs out, and Ryan calls after her, "Grace!" Josh corrects him, sayin, "Hey, Grace is right here." Ryan tells Josh that she's not Grace, Grace just ran out. "And you're not Ryan, I am." So Hannah and Josh finally realize they've both been with an imposter. They introduce themselves, decide they're both okay with the new identity of the other person, and resume making out.

Ryan finds Grace outside the apartment building, tearing ornaments off the tree. She thinks she's totally lost Ryan and breaks down. Ryan FINALLY explains that he did the exact same thing she did, using a stand-in because he was afraid, too, and that, "It's me, Grace. I'm Ryan. There have been so many times I tried to tell you..."

This is the emotional climatic scene. Build it up for all it's worth. Grace thinks at first that their relationship has been based on a lie, but Ryan reminds her that he knows and loves everything about her, and they finally kiss.

And then they look up, and sure enough, they're under a blanket of stars.