

A large, vibrant pink and orange flower is shown splashing in water against a teal background. The water is splashing upwards and outwards, creating a dynamic and energetic scene. The flower's petals are layered and detailed, with a mix of pink, orange, and yellow tones. The water splashes are captured in mid-air, with droplets and ripples visible. The overall composition is centered and visually striking.

Two
broken hearts.

Two
terrible secrets.

**IT ALL
COMES
BACK
TO YOU**

MELISSA WIESNER

IT ALL COMES BACK TO YOU

A TOTALLY EMOTIONAL AND GRIPPING PAGE-
TURNER

MELISSA WIESNER

BOOKS BY MELISSA WIESNER

It All Comes Back to You

His Secret Daughter

Our Stolen Child

The Girl in the Picture

Her Family Secret

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Books by Melissa Wiesner

A Letter from Melissa

Our Stolen Child

The Girl in the Picture

Her Family Secret

Acknowledgments

To Sid. This book could only be for you. Thanks for the inspiration.

PROLOGUE

SUMMER, PRESENT DAY

Dr. Anna Campbell had spent the last decade and a half trying not to go home. But just beyond those airport exit doors loomed Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—the city she'd spent her childhood trying to escape.

For courage, Anna gripped the gold pendant that had hung around her neck for the past two decades, rubbing her thumb on the delicate lines etched on the surface. She wasn't a scared, desperate kid anymore, and this trip was her chance to finally find the answers she'd spent half her life chasing.

To finally put the past behind her for good.

Anna squared her shoulders and followed the other weary travelers off the escalator, hesitating as they veered toward baggage claim or out the sliding doors, where friends and family would pick them up. She didn't have any bags. All of her belongings fit in the pack on her back, and nobody was coming at this late hour to get her. So, instead, she scanned the overhead signs for one that would point her to the Uber stand.

She was about to head out the doors when a low voice, from somewhere behind her, called out, "Can somebody call a doctor?"

Anna whirled around, her apprehension forgotten as her gaze jerked to one of the most beautiful men she'd ever seen, a few feet away, watching her. She stood there, immobile, as her bag slid off her shoulder and fell to the floor.

The man's mouth curved into a smile.

"Gabe!" she gasped, launching herself at him. He met her halfway, picking her up off her feet and swinging her around.

Gabriel Weatherall, her best friend in the world.

"I can't believe you're here," she said when he finally put her back on the ground.

Her plane had landed after midnight, and she'd told him she planned to grab a hotel room near the airport and get some sleep. She should have known better than to believe he'd listen to her.

"You didn't honestly think you were going to sneak back into the country after all this time, did you?" he asked.

"Well, not sneak." She flashed him a crooked smile. "Maybe just tiptoe."

Gabe shook his head and sighed, the gesture laced with amusement but also a hint of something else. Exasperation, probably. "You know my family's been counting down the days until your arrival, right?"

Anna's heart gave an unexpected lurch: Gabe's family, the Weatheralls. Gabe's huge, loud, sweet, loving, overbearing family. They'd been in her life since she was a kid, and having been embraced by them was the best thing that had ever happened to her. Still, there were times, like today, that she knew she'd never be the same as them. They viewed every transition in life as a cause for celebration, the louder and more crowded, the better. While Anna wanted nothing more than to hide out until she could figure out what to do next.

As if he could read her mind, Gabe said, "You're lucky the whole family didn't show up at baggage claim with a marching band and fireworks." He raised his eyebrows and looked at her sideways. "I suggested that might overwhelm you."

He was exaggerating, but only by a little. And just as he always had, Gabe knew her better than anyone. He understood her past, her childhood, and all the reasons why it was hard for her to open herself up to people as freely as his family did.

Well, he understood most of it. There were some things she'd never told anyone.

Even still, she knew her reserve sometimes frustrated him.

She snuck another glance at him as he grabbed her backpack. It had been four years since she'd seen him. Now in his mid-thirties, there were a few laugh lines around his eyes, and while he was still lean, he'd filled out a little since she'd been away. Of course, that only made him more attractive.

He turned around and caught her staring.

From somewhere far away, a low hum resounded, beginning quietly and building in intensity. For a second, Anna thought the luggage belt had started up over in baggage claim, but no. It was just her—just that shaky, buzzy feeling that took over her limbs when she was around Gabe.

From the tiny twitch in the corner of his eye, he felt it, too.

Just like that, she was transported to the last time she'd seen him, on that early June evening, four years ago. To the two of them on his parents' front porch, those few wooden planks that separated them a wider gulf than the ocean she'd just traversed. To that stunned expression on Gabe's face and the hurt reflected in his eyes as she'd retreated from all the lines they'd almost crossed.

She retreated again now, bending to pick up her jacket and riffle through the pockets as if finding her passport was suddenly urgent. Gabe breathed out a quiet huff, and there was that exasperation again.

For about the millionth time since the stormy spring night when she'd left the country, she wondered how time and distance had shaped Gabe's feelings about their last encounter. Was he equally glad they'd stopped before anything happened between them?

And equally sorry?

She'd never ask him.

They talked about everything. Everything except this live wire thrumming between them. That subject was so off the table, it wasn't even in the room. Because if there was one thing that mattered more to her than anything, one thing she would throw herself in front of a rushing train to protect, it was her friendship with Gabe.

It was the only thing in life she'd ever been able to count on.

PART I

ONE

FALL, FIFTEEN YEARS AGO

Anna took a shaky breath to calm the jackhammer in her chest as her professor rattled off a list of names from the podium. The guy seated to her right shot a pointed look at her worn-out sneaker, and she pressed a hand to her leg to still the nervous tapping.

The person whose name her professor was about to call had no idea that Anna's future was riding on them. As one of only a handful of high school kids who qualified for this free college program, this project was her shot at a scholarship, at a life where she wasn't always looking over her shoulder.

The sharp crinkle of paper in Dr. McGovern's hand echoed through the lecture hall as her finger slid down the list and then stopped.

Anna clutched the hem of her hand-me-down T-shirt as she waited for her new project partner's name.

"Gabriel Weatherall."

Her gaze flew across the room to the tall, dark-haired guy slouching in his chair, idly rolling his pen between his fingers.

He hitched his chin to acknowledge her and then looked away. Less than a second later, his head whipped back, and his mouth dropped open in an almost comical enactment of a double take.

Well, it would've been comical if her whole life wasn't at stake.

She forced herself to flash him a friendly smile.

As his eyebrows rose and his lip curled in disdain, Anna felt her scholarship slipping from her grasp.

Dr. McGovern paired off the remaining students on her list and then started her lecture, but Anna didn't hear a word of it. She perched an elbow on the desk and pulled her brown hair in front of her face as if she cared about things like split ends. Gazing past her long bangs, she took in Gabe's

thick black hair, fraternity T-shirt, and arms folded across his broad chest in a posture of complete self-confidence. Half the girls in the class would kill to work with Gabe for the next two semesters, but, oh my God, she wished she'd gotten almost anyone else.

This was her second class with him, not that he ever noticed her in the back of the room. But she knew who he was. Gabe was the poster boy for having it easy. He moved and spoke too confidently to have ever experienced hardship, and he was the kind of guy whose parents had told him he was smart and special from the day he was born. Everything he did reflected this, from how he jumped right into arguing a theory with a professor, to the way the sorority girls flocked to him, and he paid them just enough attention to keep them coming back—but never enough to limit his options.

Okay, so Gabe *was* smart, and more than once, she silently agreed with him when he was making a point in class. But he was too attractive, too arrogant, and too unrestrained. She needed a partner who would put his head down, not draw any attention, and work like crazy. Or better yet, back off and let her take over. Gabe Weatherall wasn't going to do either of those things.

After class, Gabe headed for the door surrounded by the group that he always sat with, not bothering to spare Anna a glance. She took her time as she carefully put her books in her backpack. Hopefully, Gabe would be too distracted to remember to wait for her, and maybe she could sneak away and contact him later about the project. If she did some research first, she could plan out what she wanted to say when they actually met up in person.

But when she stepped from the room, Gabe was leaning against the wall, alone, and watching the door. His eyes met hers, and her stomach did a slow roll. They were the palest blue, bordering on silver. Eyes like that didn't belong on a person with hair that dark, and yet, there they were. Staring back at her like storm clouds with the sun peeking through. How had she never noticed them before?

She gave herself a mental shove.

Storm clouds? Stop it.

Gabe flashed his palm in a half-assed wave, and she slowed her steps.

“Hi.” She stopped in front of him and forced her lips to curve upward. “I guess we're partners on this project.”

Gabe didn't bother to return her smile. Instead, he looked her up and down. “How old are you?”

She clutched her notebook to her chest to hide her oversized hardware

store T-shirt. One of her mom's boyfriends had left it behind after her mom kicked him out. He was a plumber, and she'd been sorry to see him go. He was one of the few nice ones, and it was the only time the radiator had worked without having to bang on it with a can of peas. The T-shirt was too big, but that's what she liked about it. It was easier to hide behind.

But why hadn't she remembered that today was the day they'd be getting their partners and tried a little harder? Now she was conscious of swimming in that enormous T-shirt, especially since she was pretty sure she'd lost some more weight recently. And being over five foot nine didn't help either. Most of the time her height only highlighted her awkwardness. A boy in her high school once told her she reminded him of Bambi, all knobby knees and giant brown eyes. He'd thought he was giving her a compliment.

Well, the best thing to do was act confident. Luckily, she'd gotten pretty good at acting lately. She cleared her throat. "Nice to meet you. I'm Anna Campbell."

Gabe blinked. "Are you a freshman?"

"And... what was your name again?" Anna pulled her shoulders back and stood up to her full height. That always worked at her job at the grocery store when she was dealing with an angry customer. *But damn it.* Gabe was still six inches taller and didn't look the least bit intimidated. Though he did look amused.

"Gabriel Weatherall. My friends call me Gabe."

"Well, Gabriel. It looks like we'll be working together for the next two semesters. So maybe we should swap emails and make a plan to meet."

Gabe hesitated for long enough to make her squirm. Was he considering how he could get out of this? Finally, he plucked her notebook from her hand and opened it to a blank page. Scribbling his name, email address, and phone number, he murmured, "Best way to reach me is to text."

He handed her notebook back, and she slowly wrote down her phone number and email address. He held out his hand to take it, but she hesitated.

Anna couldn't text him. She didn't have a cell phone, just a crappy cordless landline that had been in the apartment when they moved in. She curled her toes inside her sneakers and forgot she was supposed to be acting confident. "I, um... Email is really better for me, if that's okay..." She didn't have a computer either. Or Wi-Fi. But she practically lived in the library and could use the computer lab there.

He took the paper with her information and studied it as if it contained

some clue to who she was. “Sure, whatever. So, when can you meet?”

She pressed her lips together. He wasn’t going to like this. “Well, I can’t really meet during the week. I’m only on campus on Tuesdays for classes.”

Gabe ran his hand through his hair, making it stick out sideways. At least he wasn’t the kind of guy who used fifty pounds of gel in his hair. “Okay. I have a car,” he said. “Where do you live? I can meet in your neighborhood, or we could work at your place.”

Her breath caught at the idea of this attractive, confident, clearly wealthy college guy coming to her *apartment* to work on their project. He’d think... Her cheeks burned. She couldn’t even imagine what he’d think. It didn’t matter because it was never going to happen. But they *were* going to be spending a lot of time together over the next two semesters. So, she had to tell him at least a little bit about herself, as much as it pained her. “Look, I can’t meet during the week. I’m in school all day. And after school, I work.”

She watched the confusion spread across his face. “You’re in school all day. School, like...”

“School, like, high school.”

“*High school?*” His head jerked back like she’d taken a swing at him. “What are you doing in global economics? Usually seniors take this class.” Gabe laughed, but his face was grim. “*College seniors.*”

“I’m in a free program for promising high school students.” Anna didn’t mention the part of the program aimed at “low-income” or “at-risk” students. She hated the phrase “at risk.” She didn’t need a reminder of all the risks involved in her situation right now. “It’s really competitive. I’ve been taking classes since I was a sophomore. When I graduate from high school, I’ll be able to use the credits toward my bachelor’s degree.”

Not to mention if she aced this project, she’d be on every professor’s radar when she applied for honors scholarships.

Guys like Gabe didn’t have to worry about scholarships.

“Since you were a sophomore,” he repeated. “And now you’re a...?”

She sighed. “I’m a junior. I’m sixteen.” Gabe was a college senior, probably twenty-one already, so Anna could sympathize with his surprise at ending up with a high school student as his partner. But surely he knew Dr. McGovern wouldn’t have let her in the class if she didn’t belong there.

He pushed away from the wall and took a step toward her. “Seriously? Sixteen? The most important project of my college career, and my partner is still waiting to hit puberty?”

Maybe Anna was only sixteen, but suddenly her body ached like an old lady's. She'd unloaded boxes at the grocery store until ten o'clock the night before and then stayed up past midnight doing homework. Every night that week would be the same. She didn't need to stand here and listen to this.

Pressing her hands to her hips, she glared at him. Up close, those eyes weren't so special. Calling them silver had been a stretch. They were nothing but gray. Murky, dishwasher gray.

"Look, I can do the work. I've gotten As in every class I've taken. I work hard. You won't have to carry my weight. So you'll still have time for hazing freshmen and getting sorority girls wasted on cheap beer, or whatever it is you Theta Chis do in your spare time."

She regretted the words as soon as they came out of her mouth.

Gabe took a step back. "Wow."

Could this have gone any worse? It wouldn't surprise her if he went to Dr. McGovern and demanded a different partner. She'd practically had to beg to get in the class, and if Gabe switched to another group, she'd really be screwed.

Gabe's eyebrows knitted together. "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but you've got it all wrong." Anna was about to stammer out an apology when his mouth twisted into a smile. "Theta Chis are way too classy to offer girls cheap beer. We usually go with mixed drinks."

Anna stared at her sneakers to hide her smile.

Gabe sighed. "Look, we're stuck with each other, so we might as well get to it. Do you work on Sunday?"

She shook her head.

"Let's meet at the library. Noon?"

She nodded, still half expecting him to try and switch partners.

"I'll do my best to drag my hungover ass out of bed." He took off down the hall and, without turning around, called back, "Try not to get grounded between now and Sunday."

As Anna watched his tall frame round the corner, she slumped back against the wall. How were the two of them going to work together without killing each other?

If the past five minutes were any indication, it was going to be a very long year.

TWO

On Saturday evening, Gabe's roommates rolled in with a group of girls from their fraternity's sister sorority. They hung out on the front porch of their old brick fraternity house, drinking beer out of plastic cups and soaking up what might've been the last rays of summer sunshine before fall blew in.

Normally, he would have been right in the mix—talking shit with Jake and the other guys, crushing it at beer pong—but it was senior year, and as his dad liked to remind him, time to start thinking about the future. That meant getting his grad school applications in early to qualify for the best research positions.

Gabe headed out the front door with his bag slung over his shoulder, giving his friends on the porch a wave. He was halfway across the lawn when one of the sorority girls called his name. He turned as she tapped down the porch steps in her high-heeled sandals and tossed her blond hair over her shoulder, showing off the tan she'd probably perfected by the pool over the summer.

"You're not leaving, are you?" The girl fiddled with one dangly earring.

He dragged his gaze upward, to her face, and then flashed her a grin. "Sorry, sweetie, I'd love to stay and hang out with you, but I've got work to do."

Behind the girl, Jake rolled his eyes and made a gagging motion. Gabe was pretty sure he knew what that was about. All the guys gave him a hard time because when he forgot a girl's name, he called her "sweetie."

This particular girl didn't seem to mind. She gave him a wide grin. "It's Saturday night. You can do your work tomorrow. Stay and have a drink." Her fingers grazed his forearm.

It was a gorgeous evening, and the idea of staying with her was pretty appealing. But tomorrow was Sunday, and he was supposed to meet that high

school girl about their project. He didn't even want to think about it. And then after, he had family stuff.

"Sorry, but I should go." He checked her out from the corner of his eye. "But, hey, I'll do my best to get my stuff done and make it back in time to hang out later."

She flashed him a satisfied smile. "Great. I'll be here."

With one more wave, he took off down the street toward campus.

When Gabe got to the library, he made his way to the main study area. A group of students wearing hip glasses and scarves draped around their necks sat in one corner debating the merits of a recent best-selling novel. Three skinny kids, probably computer science majors, occupied another corner, geeking out over a program someone was developing on their laptop.

The only other student sat with her back to the room. Her long, dark hair swung over her shoulder as she sifted through a huge pile of books and scribbled in a notebook.

It was beautiful weather and still early in the semester. Most students had something better to do than hang out at the library on a Saturday night. If his grad school applications weren't so important, it was the last place he'd be.

Gabe rubbed the back of his neck and sighed as he pulled his laptop from his bag. He was applying for PhD programs in economics and considering some of the best schools—Harvard, MIT, the University of Chicago, Stanford. Gabe was one of the strongest students in his undergrad program. If he went to the top PhD program and published his research with the most respected economists in the field, he could pretty much write his own ticket after that. But first, he had to pass global econ, which suddenly wasn't looking like such a sure thing.

He'd thought about going to Dr. McGovern and asking for a new partner, but whining wasn't Gabe's style, and it wasn't going to impress anyone. So, he'd sucked it up and agreed to meet with the high school girl. *Anna*. He wasn't about to call her "sweetie."

What he needed was a plan. He could take charge and assign Anna some easy tasks—basic research on topics he identified, formatting charts and graphs, that kind of thing—and steer the project in the direction he wanted. It could work out in his favor. A nervous and intimidated high school girl might be easier to deal with than one of the other econ majors. He could tell Anna what he wanted her to do, and she'd go along with whatever he said.