



Before We Were Strangers

Renee Carlino

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From the *USA TODAY* bestselling author of *Sweet Thing* and *Nowhere But Here* comes a love story about a Craigslist “missed connection” post that gives two people a second chance at love fifteen years after they were separated in New York City.

To the Green-eyed Lovebird:

We met fifteen years ago, almost to the day, when I moved my stuff into the NYU dorm room next to yours at Senior House.

You called us fast friends. I like to think it was more.

We lived on nothing but the excitement of finding ourselves through music (you were obsessed with Jeff Buckley), photography (I couldn’t stop taking pictures of you), hanging out in Washington Square Park, and all the weird things we did to make money. I learned more about myself that year than any other.

Yet, somehow, it all fell apart. We lost touch the summer after graduation when I went to South America to work for National Geographic. When I came back, you were gone. A part of me still wonders if I pushed you too hard after the wedding...

I didn’t see you again until a month ago. It was a Wednesday. You were rocking back on your heels, balancing on that thick yellow line that runs along the subway platform, waiting for the F train. I didn’t know it was you until it was too late, and then you were gone. Again. You said my name; I saw it on your lips. I tried to will the train to stop, just so I could say hello.

After seeing you, all of the youthful feelings and memories came flooding back to me, and now I’ve spent the better part of a month wondering what your life is like. I might be totally out of my mind, but would you like to get a drink with me and catch up on the last decade and a half?

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Before We Were Strangers Details

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From Reader Review Before We Were Strangers for online ebook

Amy Harmon says

I got a chance to read an ARC of this book. I had never read anything by Renee Carlino before, but I have admired her from afar and had heard nothing but good things. I LOVED this book. And it made me cry. That rarely happens to me. I read with half my brain in critique mode. I can't help it. It must come from writing novels myself, but I can't ever turn off that part of my brain when I read anymore. But my brain was quiet and my heart was heavy in a lovely fat way. I highly recommend.

Judith says

*** JUST AMAZING... ***

This book had me feeling all kinds of emotions...it totally captivated me. Just a wonderful piece of writing. It's a story of the beautiful thing that is first love and second chances.

First love...all the tangled emotions that come with it. The hopes, the dreams, the insecurities but because you love so hard you firmly believe in the future...

Second chances...how mistakes and misunderstanding can shape the pattern of your lives...

The story starts in the present day where Matt is evaluating his life. One day on the subway platform he has an encounter that brings memories flooding back...

The first half of the book goes back to the past.

Matt and Grace meet when they have rooms next to each other at college. They discover they have a lot in common and quickly become friends and are inseparable.

You called us fast friends. I like to think it was more. _Matt

I loved Grace, she had such spirit and a fierce determination to be independent as she struggled to put herself through college with no help from her family. Matt is captivated by her and they eventually become lovers. After graduation Matt leaves for a summer internship for a few months while Grace stays in New York preparing for Grad school. The plan is to meet up again at the end of the summer...

The story then moves to the present day where they have not seen each other or had any contact for 15

years....until the encounter on the subway.

Matt cannot stop thinking about her and puts a post on 'Missed Connections' in an attempt to reach her.She sees the post and they meet up again.

I don't want to give too much more away but there are secrets revealed as we find out about the last 15 years of their lives.

This is just a beautiful story that I cannot recommend highly enough.....

Pavlina Read more sleep less blog♥♥ says

IT'S LIVE

Amazon: <http://t.co/kIjeEcUqA6>

B&N:... <https://t.co/7GjkrjEVR8>

5 BEAUTIFUL STARS

Such a beautiful,sweet,heartbroken,intense and emotional story!!I didn't want to finish it!It felt so realistic and unique and I had so many feelings while I was reading it!This story touched me in so many ways that there are moments that I was crying and other moments where I was smiling and swooning because I was so happy!The story is told both in the present and in the past and this made me feel so inside the story,like I was with Grace and Matt!

We see how they became friends in the past when they were still in college.How they slowly developed a passionate and intense relationship!And soon this developed in something more,an epic love.But sometimes people have dreams and love isn't enough to keep people together.Now after 15 years they meet again and love is still there.But nothing can be easy,they have to uncover secrets to finally have their second chance..

I loved Matt and Grace so much!They are one of these couples that you wish they have their happy ending!!There is something special in their relationship, there is love,passion and intensity.I fell in love with Matt immediately!I loved him so much especially the moments he was crying because this made him real!You don't read often about men crying in books.Grace is sweet,funny and kind.I can see why Matt fell in love with her!There are moments where she talked about her family and I feel sorry for her!Close to the end around 80% , we have a twist which I didn't see it coming!

This book was a surprise for me since I have read a book from this author before and I didn't like it a lot!But with this one she goes on the top of my favorite books and authors!If you are looking for an emotional story

this is exactly what you need!!I highly recommend it!!

ARC provided by Atria Books via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

London says

I need a good hour to sit down and vent everything that was wrong with this book. That fucking pathetic excuse for a hero that I would have loved to punch in the nuts! Ugh don't even get me started

I had fallen in love with him at the beginning only for everything to go completely downhill after 25%!

The book starts out in his POV and for the first 20 some odd % into the book I was thinking "omg finally a 5 star read!" I was so sure that this was going to be an epic love story but it all went down hill after that.

STRIKE ONE

Matt & Grace aren't officially together for the first several months into their friendship, however, to me they were basically together. They spent all of their time together and they were completely inseparable. At one point in the book some people mention to Grace how the dark room where Matt goes to print is film is known for having raging parties and people hooking up. She considers how this might be true because every Friday when Matt would come home from the dark room he would be a bit tipsy. They weren't officially together and hadn't even kissed yet but it was easy to understand how she might assume it could be true.

She goes to dinner with a professor that she has a feeling might be into her but it was totally platonic. She sees Matt on the way to the restaurant but she's so hurt by what she heard that she tells him to go and brushes him off. When she gets back to the dorms from dinner Matt is sitting on the couch with a girl on his lap and taking body shots off her tits and making out with her right in front of Grace.

To me this was A COMPLETE 180 from the Matt we get when we read the book in his POV. It just felt so out of character and quite frankly incredibly cruel. What bothered me the most is that when she tries to get him jealous too by saying okay fine I'll hook up with a guy there.. he stops here. And that's it.

The subject is never brought up again and he never even apologizes for his behavior. That was one major strike against him for me. It was just insensitive and incredibly immature.

STRIKE TWO

Once the two are finally together everything is smooth sailing but their relationship is kind of in limbo. He accepts a National Geographic photography internship out of the country for 3 months and never even considered her at all when saying yes. At this point they are in love and he claims to be so in love with her. Wtf?

However, when the heroine is offered a wonderful opportunity to travel for a year in her professors orchestra, she says no. You know it's because she loves the hero so much. The topic of what's going to happen between them comes up but not once during the conversations does he ever consider or bring up not going or what

will happen between them.

A while before he is set to leave she asks him what he would say if she were to ask him not to go and he gets PISSED. Not only that but when she's asking him why he doesn't just leave his belongings in her dorm rather than send them back to his mom in California if he's only going to be gone for three months he says "right, but you never know." He didn't even think of her and would have obviously stayed longer and not even taken her into consideration. It just broke my heart to see him hurting her and he didn't seem in love with her AT ALL.

He jerked back and crossed his arms over his chest, cocking his head to the side.

"Would you ask me to?" Frustration could be read in every line on his face.

Lying there beneath him, I felt more vulnerable than I ever had before. I wanted to ask him to stay, but how could I be so selfish? If I asked him, would he love me less, if he even loved me at all? I couldn't take his dream away to make mine better. I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't destroy what we had created.

"Answer me. Would you fucking ask me to turn this down?"

I didn't want him to, but I just needed to know if he would. "Would you stay if I asked you to?"

His jaw clenched. He was breathing heavily. Through gritted teeth, he seethed, "Yes, but I'd hate you for it. So ask me. Go ahead." It felt like he was taunting me. I began to cry.

"Ask me to fucking stay here and work at the PhotoHut while you go to grad school. Do it."

I shook my head but couldn't form the words.

He bent over and gripped my face hard, glaring into my eyes. "Fucking Christ, Grace, this isn't good-bye. This is 'see you later.' Tell me you can handle that, please. Say that you can handle that."

I was hyperventilating now. He was angry but his expression revealed love beneath the ferocity.

"We made no promises to each other," I whispered. "I'm sorry I brought it up. We'll just see how things go, okay? This is just a 'see you later.' "

He nodded. "That's right."

WHAT AN ASSHOLE!

STRIKE THREE

Don't even get me started on when he gets pissed at the heroine when he finds out something that HIS EX-WIFE caused NOT THE HEROINE.

He finds out that his ex wife is the reason that he didn't end up with grace and that she had in fact been trying to reach him for years. And yet when the cock sucking asshole finds out about the daughter he never met he has the audacity to get pissed at the heroine? You stupid fucking dick she had still been trying to reach you after she thought you dumped her for another woman! How dare he get pissed at her and say she didn't try

hard enough!? How he fuck was she supposed to know the letters that your ex wife wrote pretending to be you weren't actually from you. And then the son of a bitch dead beat asshole (sorry but I'm so angry I have to curse to vent it all out) immediately runs out the door and leaves her standing there. He then accepts a job out of the country because he's so upset. You stupid ass fucking worthless piece of garbage! You don't even think "oh shit maybe I should meet the daughter I'm allegedly so upset I've never met?" Fuck this piece of garbage book.

Not only that but when he reads one of the letters she had written him (his ex wife had kept them from him) HE STILL DOESN'T APOLOGIZE!!! They don't get back together and he sees her crying and how sick she feels over the whole situation AND DOES NOTHING! THE LAST 30% OF THE BOOK THEY STILL AREN'T TOGETHER !! He doesn't pursue anything with her or apologize and tell her how thankful he is that she raised such a wonderful daughter. The cock sucking mother fucker didn't love her he was a pathetic little dick that only thought of himself! He sleeps with her twice but never considers something more with her when she DID NOTHING FUCKING WRONG! She wrote letters for years even after she thought he was with someone else just to let him know about his daughter.

If I was were I would never have written him fuck all. I know he didn't know he had a daughter but WHY WAS HE CONTINUING TO PUNISH HER FOR SOMETHING THAT WASN'T HER FAULT? Instead of taking it out on his whore of an ex wife he takes it out on the woman that he CLAIMS to love?

They spend the next few months alternating weekends or nights with their daughter and never once does he try to make things right with her. He should have been worshipping the ground she walked on for raising their daughter. She could have easily had an abortion, she was young and had her whole life ahead of her and yet she kept her, loved her, and raised a wonderful child.

I hated the heroine for loving such a pathetic excuse for a man. He had no backbone and was such a selfish bastard. He didn't love her enough to stay and he didn't love her enough when she DID NOTHING WRONG. This book needed major groveling and all we got was a shitty second chance romance.

Then out of no where they finally get together and a few pages later they get married. The end. For the few people who mentioned that he takes his rage out on the bitch of an ex wife... NOPE! He never confronts her about the letters or fucking rips her a new one. No, he saved all his anger and asshole behavior for the mother of his child. The only innocent one in the whole situation. I wanted him to go after the ex-wife and rip her to shreds but it's just glossed over!

Fuck this book. complete and utter garbage.

Christy says

[and if it wasn't for my HUGE issue with one bit of miscommunication it

Geri Reads says

This book sort of sneaked up on me. Despite the fact that it used one of my least favorite plot devices in romance ever, I still ended up liking this a lot.

Matt and Grace met during their senior year at NYU. Grace is a music major while Matt is photography. They immediately bonded from the moment they met through their mutual love of the arts and Jeff Buckley. Slowly but surely their friendship evolved from friendship into something more. They became inseparable but the end of college, miscommunication, and misunderstanding brought an end to their relationship. Their break-up had far-reaching implication on both of them. While they moved on with other people, they never really got over each other.

Fifteen years later, Matt saw Grace and everything came rushing back. But picking up the pieces of their relationship was harder said than done. And both Matt and Grace had to deal with secrets and resentments and a whole slew of other issues.

Before We Were Strangers was told in dual POV and is set in the past and the present. Renee Carlino slowly unravel the threads for her readers in her trademark prose, which I find really engaging. Grace was a free spirit and Matt is desperate to prove to his father that he didn't make a mistake in choosing photography instead of law.

The first part was a bit slow but since I don't mind slow, it wasn't an issue for me. The only issue for me was the plot device used to break them up. I truly loathe (view spoiler) plot device simply because it brings too much unnecessary drama and assumption that usually don't end well for the characters and me as the reader. But like I said, despite that I felt for both Grace and Matt. They suffered the consequence of their actions. I didn't mind the other plot device since I felt it was handled well. But again, the involvement of another character which I felt added to the length of their separation was grating. Ugh. Also, Matt was a wet noodle for not trying hard enough. I'm pretty sure we already have Internet in the late '90s but he didn't really try very hard to find Grace. Which was disappointing.

Still, this book tugged at my heartstrings. Plus the writing was stellar. I loved Renee Carlino's voice. So despite my issues with the plot and the characters, this book touched me. I was rooting for the characters to get their HEA, and once my feelings get invested, those little annoyances usually fade into the background.

ARC provided by Atria via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Sara►[hiatus] (Ink Is My Sword) says

★★★★1/2

“The past doesn’t belong to us anymore, and the future is just a fantasy, never guaranteed. But the present is ours to own. The only way we can realize that fantasy is if we embrace the now.”

► FULL REVIEW NOW POSTED

You can also find it on my blog, Ink Is My Sword?

All images were found in pinterest, I do not own any of them.

Depicts perfectly a love story that is raw, flawed, real and at the same time beautiful. My heart was beating alongside all the tangible moments.

?

I have seen this book floating around for years now, it always intrigued but because I am me I tend to abstain to read books with a lot of hype or that I know I will love. That, of course, changed rapidly when I saw it for 1.99 in Amazon, I mean come on who can resist good deals. I picked this book knowing it was about a young cellist, a second chance romance, and that I would cry. **I never knew though that I was gonna be captivated by the writing, addicted to the story, swooning with cute sentiments, and that I was gonna overall feel happy rather than sad.** I loved this book so much, but it lacked just a tiny bit to make me give it full five stars.

The writing was magnifique. It had an excellent flow, it carried so much emotion and realness, it truly touched me. Renné also made a wonderful job at creating scenes that were so well described and thought out I could imagine them happening to me. The dual point of view worked well for me even though the perspectives weren't changing in a regular manner. In terms of the plot course, I found incredibly effective that we start 15 years after and we travel back in time, we knew things did not work for them the first time which made everything more impactful.

I grew so attached to all the characters that we were meant to love and also disliked fervently the ones we were supposed to hate. Matt with his passion for photography and capturing beautiful moments, his adventurer side and deep love for his mom, won me over. On the other hand, Grace was a character I was intrigued deeply by, her survivor tactics for being poor (I took close note), her musician soul, and her innocence felt realistic. The mix of both of them together taking their younger days one stride at a time had me highly entertained. But not only our main characters held my attention, Grace's best friend and the professor Pornsake and Matt's mother and of course (view spoiler), they contributed deeply in the story. **Renee used the side characters output to make an impact in the storyline of our hero and heroine, reminding us that people surrounding us can make changes in our circumstances too.** This cast made the story felt less fiction but realistic and relatable, which I was a huge fan of.

I usually like to read about "perfect" relationships, connections I know in real life one in a million has it, I love to leave my fantasy through characters. Amazingly I never knew until this book how much I appreciate and love to read about relationships that are realistic and still quite amazing. Matt and **Grace's relationship was that eye opener for me, from the start of the relationship to their difficulties and how they reunited years later, it reminded me of all the amazing love stories that are not perfect that surround me.** My mom and that, great age difference, amazing love, but not a happily ever after, my dad died but even 18 years after my mom still loves him and has never married again. My uncle and aunt a second marriage, a relationship at a long distance, never could have kids but my aunt raised my uncle's kids for the first marriage as if they were her own. The love of this near people is certainly to perfect or fairy tale like, but still hugely powerful and swoon-worthy. **What I am trying to say is Before We Were Strangers reminded me, love doesn't have to have a perfect course and it can be realistic.** Matt literally stole my teenage heart, I really wish I am able to find a love like that in my college days. Someone real with flaws but that respects you, is open about their feelings and loves to be with you. Granted sometimes he was an ass, like when he opened the door of Grace's room and stared at her while she changed, or perhaps that he never fought as hard as he wanted her to fight for him when they separated ways. But also someone like Grace, with an adventurer side, someone who doesn't mind doing weird activities. I seriously fell in love with so many scenes of them together.

The last point I wanna talk about is how the second chance romance was handled. I found so mesmerizing how they didn't find each other again until 15 years later, years in which both made separate lives and fell in love with other people. The book represented well the whole "Life keeps going and you just need to catch up". Distance affecting relationship is a reality I was glad it was acknowledged in this story.

Overall I loved this story, I highly recommend it to all romance readers and even those who are just

starting to dip their feet in the genre. My only complaint was that I wished it was a bit longer and that I didn't cry. But I am not as sad because of the later, the book made me grin like a fool. Also sorry I got a bit too personal.

"It was such a strange idea knowing he and I were moving for our own pleasure while giving it back to each other, equally. Like nothing else in life, sex is perfectly selfless and selfish all at once. Hot and cold, yin and yang, black and white, and all of the shades in between. Finally, the whole world made sense. I was in on the secret now."

?How real everyone and everything felt & the writing.
?I wish it was a bit longer, or with a less abrupt ending.

?

Recommendation. If you like second-chance romances, realistic stories that are carried out during the span of different years and wonderful writing then you will enjoy this book.

I want to know: Did you cry while reading? Who was your favorite character?

?**Pre-reading thoughts:**

??Crossing fingers I am gonna love this. If you have read this, am I gonna cry? I need to get ready with the tissues.

-SMUT-A-THON book #2 / Second Chances.

Allison ♥?Will Never Conquer Her TBR♥? says

4 Second Chance Stars!

To the Green-eyed Lovebird: We met fifteen years ago, almost to the day, when I moved my stuff into the NYU dorm room next to yours at Senior House.....

Before We Were Strangers had a book blurb that captured my attention immediately. What a unique spin on a second chance romance...Missed Connections on Craigslist. Couple that with the fact that this is written by Renee Carlino, the author of one of my favorite NA romance novels, *Sweet Thing*, I couldn't wait to dive into it!

Before We Were Strangers is divided into then and now. I'll divide my review as such because my opinion is split almost as if it was two different books with two different sets of characters.

THEN

Matt and **Grace** meet while in college. Matt is a photography student and Grace is a music major, a gifted cellist. Grace comes from almost nothing and struggles to pay her tuition, much less afford food. She fast learned how to make very little go very far. Matt is attracted by her inner strength, her positive attitude and they become fast friends. Matt's father is very wealthy so he doesn't much struggle for the things that Gracie does. He wants to help her...her pride be damned.

I LOVED this aspect of the book. NA is definitely hit or miss for me but this was PERFECTION. Ms. Carlino built their relationship one step at a time. It was realistic and I grew in love with their connection as two unique, fun college kids. It wasn't rushed. It wasn't insta-love. Those days hanging out in the dorm room, Grace practicing cello, Matt photographing Grace in every imaginable situation...it was innocent and sweet. Did I also mention Matt was perfect? Well, all good things must come to an end, maybe. Matt is offered a huge opportunity to go overseas for the summer after they graduate. Just for a few months and he will be back for Grace while she prepares for graduate school.....

NOW

This is the aspect of the book that somewhat failed for me. We see from the blurb that Matt spots Grace from across the subway platform but she's gone before he has the chance to catch her. They both set eyes on each other. He SAW her whisper his name. He HAS to reconnect with her.

What is this *Missed Connections* on Craigslist? It's a venue for people to post messages for *missed connections* with people they may or may not know. "To the woman I saw running down the street today at State and Eisenhower. You're beautiful..." Posted such as that. I had no clue such a beast existed. It's strangely very romantic to me. I found myself looking online to my area Missed Connections. Some are SO sweet and romantic, some weirdly sexual and stalker-ish. But I digress...

This is an example of where time jumps fail me. I really didn't mind all the events of NOW. My issue is more with what happened BETWEEN the *then* and *now*. My mind is still a little befuddled and I feel the author didn't 100% clear up why they fell out of touch while he was overseas. And, let's face it, that's a huge premise of the book! It just didn't make sense to me. Do not click the spoiler unless you've read this book or don't plan to- (view spoiler) So, because of this giant question mark for me, I had to deduct a solid star. I really liked their reconnection part of the book yet my mind kept going back to the questions I had during the 15-year time gap.

Aside for my inner questions, this is a great book by Renee Carlino. She has the ability to create characters I immediately fall in love with. You can completely picture each person, envision their personalities and interactions.

This quote is while they were giving blood platelets for money during those poor days in college. Talk about endearingly cute...

“You come here a lot?”

“That’s such an old pickup line, Matt. I think you need new material.”

“I’m really into girls with big platelets.”

“Much better. Now you have my attention. You’re in luck, because I’m really into guys named Mathew.”

“It’s Matthias, actually.”

“No shit?” She cocked her head to the side. “I’ve never heard that name before. Is it biblical?”

“Yep. It means God-like.”

“Stop.”

“No, I’m serious. It means God-like appendage.”

Before We Were Strangers is a great second chance, friends to lovers, romance that, for me, was both tragic and endearing. Characters both intelligent and so very stupid. Mature beyond their years yet immature in their own relationship, budding-life ways. I can see how events in this book may bother some readers. It didn't bother me to the point of not enjoying the book. It just gave me the lingering "huh?" through till the end. And I'm still kinda befuddled...

I'd still highly recommend this book for those who loved Sweet Thing. The character of Matt is so stinking endearing. I loved him. And I commend Ms Carlino for creating a NA book twice now that I truly enjoy!

I had to include this excerpt only because it's written so perfectly, describing that first feeling of falling in love. I just thought Ms Carlino hit this interpretation of first love right on the mark-

You can't re-create the first time you promise to love someone or the first time you feel loved by another. You cannot relive the sensation of fear, admiration, self-consciousness, passion, and desire all mixed into one because it never happens twice. You chase it like the first high for the rest of your life. It doesn't mean you can't love another or move on; it just means that the one spontaneous moment, the split second that you took the leap, when your heart was racing and your mind was muddled with What ifs?—that moment—will never happen the same way again. It will never feel as intense as the first time.

Well said!

Advanced copy received by Atria Publishing via NetGalley in exchange for my honest review. Quotes are taken from pre-published version and may change in final product.

Hulya Kara Yuksel says

The End and I'm crying so bad.. :(My God, It was phenomenal. This book gave me a lot things to think about. <3

I felt every sad and happy moment while I was reading it. I loved it so much... :)

Please just read this amazing book and don't forget to listen Jeff Buckley's Grace album while you're reading it. Link is below. :)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bawbk...>

And Renee, thank you so much for this story. :)

“You can’t re-create the first time you promise to love someone or the first time you feel loved by another. You cannot relive the sensation of fear, admiration, self-consciousness, passion, and desire all mixed into one because it never happens twice. You chase it like the first high for the rest of your life. It doesn’t mean you can’t love another or move on; it just means that the one spontaneous moment, the split second that you took the leap, when your heart was racing and your mind was muddled with What ifs?—that moment—will never happen the same way again. It will never feel as intense as the first time. At least, that’s the way I remember it. That’s why my mother always said we memorialize our past. Everything seems better in a memory.”

“The present is our own. The right-this-second, the here-and-now, this moment before the next, is ours for the taking. It’s the only free gift the universe has to offer. The past doesn’t belong to us anymore, and the future is just a fantasy, never guaranteed. But the present is ours to own. The only way we can realize that fantasy is if we embrace the now.”

“And in that moment, you realize how little control you have over your own destiny. From the time you're born, you have no control; you can't choose your parents, and, unless you're suicidal, you can't choose your death. The only thing you can do is choose the person you love, be kind to others, and make your brutally short stint on earth as pleasant as possible.”

"Like nothing else in life, sex is perfectly selfless and selfish all at once. Hot and cold, yin and yang, black and white, and all of the shades in between."

"It was like the universe was teasing us; we saw each other just a second too late."

"Once there was a you and me
We were lovers
We were friends
Before life changed
Before we were strangers
Do you still think of me?"

Michelle says

This blurb was probably one of the most intriguing and captivating blurbs I've stumbled across. The moment I read it, this book became an obsession. I needed to read it, I had to.

Matt has the career most photographers would kill for. Fifteen years, an esteemed position working for National Geographic and a Pulitzer Prize photo adorning his wall. But a career isn't everything. Divorced and standing still in a city that moves at the speed of light, Matt is lost. Then one day it happens. He sees her. Grace. It has been fifteen years since he said 'see you later' and she's just there. But then she's gone. A moment where their eyes lock, recognition strikes and old feelings begin to stir. Suddenly Matt's world goes from gray to color.

When the idea of placing an ad in the Missed Connections section of Craigslist, Matt figures, what does he have to lose? Now, for anyone who has ever been bored and read through these, you know how addicting they are. I do this. Often. I can't help myself. The one romantic post is so worth reading through all the sexual propositions and just dirty, dirty posts. So months pass and Matt hears nothing from his Green-eyed Lovebird, until someone shows her the ad and she responds.

But this love story isn't just as simple as that. Fifteen years have passed. A love that existed was lost somewhere, somehow along the way. And before we can get to the finish, we must first go to the beginning.

The past is revisited from the first day when Matt meets Grace, through their friendship and ultimately as they fall in love. But as often with young love, ambitions dictate decisions. You're young, there is always more time to love but you only get one chance to live. So circumstances separate these two just as they are discovering how much their hearts belong to one another.

Watching these two fall in love was a thrilling experience. I fell head over heels with these two characters. They were so well written, complex and carried such depth. There was this whimsical feeling that made you feel just as carefree as these two souls as they had the world at their feet. A young love, rich in feeling even if they were managing to get by with just the bare essentials.

From his constant need to capture her on film to the moments he listens to her play her cello through the dorm walls; these two were perfection. Absolute perfection. And although you know that they spent the last

fifteen years apart, your heart still breaks when it all falls apart. I was so lost in this story that everything outside of the words right in front of me just did not exist. My heart ached for the loss that these two must have felt. The loss of all those years, all those experiences. Everything that they could never get back.

As they reunite they talk about the lives they lived apart, reminisce on the days they spent young and in love and ultimately how they both still feel for each other now. But a lot happened in those fifteen years and the devastation as to what eventually led to the split is revealed, leaving you absolutely gutted just as your heart started to smile again.

I was all over the place while reading this book. The highs were utterly fantastic and the lows, well those stole my breath and left a trail of tears in their wake. This was my first read from Renee Carlino although she's a name that has been on my list to read for some time. If this is the style of writing and storytelling I have to look forward to, I know it won't be my last.

Before We Were Strangers hits all the spots in a second chance romance. This is a beloved storyline in the romance genre and this book is the perfect example to showcase why that is. A stunning love story exists inside these pages, one that became so vivid that it was as if it was leaping off the pages. I was a voyeur into Matt & Grace's world for a few hours and I can say that it a place I'd love to visit again and again.

Catarina says

4 Second Chance Stars.

Matt and Grace fell in love during college and they thought it would be forever. Unfortunately life got in the way and for the next 15 years they didn't see each other and their lives moved on in different directions. In only took one random morning for them to see each other again in the NY subway in a way and life bring them together again. But 15 years change a lot of things, so can this be their second change of re-kindle their love or sometimes life is too different to fall back in love?

Second change romances are my favorites, I'm a completely goner for them, and despite not being big fans of convenient misunderstandings, I like them so much I really don't mind. Join a first love romance, nice characters and a sweet, emotional and romantic background and you have a winner for me. There was some aspects within the plot that I really didn't care much for, but in overall this was a great reading. A great second chance love story that proves that Renée Carlino sure knows how to write a good story and captivate the reader.

If you're in the mood for a good and solid romance, this is a good choice.

Rating: 4 Stars.

Characters Development: I like how realistic the characters are. Regular jobs, some curveballs in their life, but regular people with normal dreams to whom life gave a second chance. Matt was a good guy, Grace was sweet and they together were a really nice couple. There was a character that I hoped that something bad happened because it deserved a good dose of bad karma, but unfortunately it didn't happen. (And I had to take brownie points because of it.)

Steam: Some heated scenes.

Sensible Subjects: (view spoiler)

Love Triangle: (view spoiler)

Cheating: (view spoiler)

HEA: (view spoiler)

Arianna ♦ *SteamyReadsBlog* ♦ says

3.5 Stars!!

"Before We Were Strangers" is a sweet, emotional story about two individuals who fall for each other two times. It's a story about falling in love for the first time/finding second chance at love. Intense and heartwarming, but also heartbreaking at times, this story is told both in the past and in the present from both MC characters' perspective. You certainly will enjoy this story if you're a fan of missed connections listings.

"To the Green-eyed Lovebird: We met fifteen years ago, almost to the day, when I moved my stuff into the NYU dorm room next to yours at Senior House..."

Matt and Grace meet each other in college. Matt is a photography student and Grace is a music major. Matt has good reasons from wanting to escape LA. While his family has money, Grace's family is poor. She's struggles to pay her tuition and she's trying really hard to get good enough to be a studio musician. Matt is mesmerized with Grace from the beginning. She seems shy, but she can also be brazen. He is drawn to her like a moth to a flame and Grace seems to be intrigue by Matt as well. They start to hang out every day and soon they become more, but fate intervenes and they somehow are split up.

"I just met her at the wrong time. Fifteen years have gone by and I still think about her."

Fifteen years have passed and Matt still remembers Grace and how good they were together. He never forget her smile or how talented she was with her cello, he never found a way to let her go. He recently divorced, so he's not looking for a relationship. But when he spots Grace from across the subway and she seems to recognize him, he knows he has to find her. He posts a missed connection add on Craigslist and hopes that somehow Grace for a second time will find her way to him.

"We were victims of bad timing. But here we are again."

"*Before We Were Strangers*" was a sweet, enjoyable read, well written for the most part and while I didn't love it, I liked it. Honestly I enjoyed the past more. IMO was written better and unlike the present nothing was rushed. At least for me. I love first love romance novels, so I really enjoyed this aspect here. I loved how Matt and Grace started a tentative friendship that blossomed to something more. Their relationship development was really well done. You can actually figure out when exactly their feelings for each other start to change. Matt and Grace were great, endearing characters. I liked them separately and I loved them together. They were sweet, they were fun and they warmed my heart with their antics and interactions.

"No one could change the past or give us back the time we had lost, and there were no words to make everything better. We just had to accept the present for what it was."

The past had some enjoyable moments as well. It was great seeing these characters trying to reconnect. Both Matt and Grace from the past were likeable and I liked the fact that their voices felt different from the ones in the past. I liked the fact that they never forget each other, but I would have liked to feel a more powerful connection between them.

What it didn't work for me in was the miscommunication between these two characters and of course the drama that followed. Also, I think both Matt and Grace didn't try finding each other hard enough. I won't go into details about what actually happened, but for me the whole situation they were in wasn't so believable. The ending was sweet and full of hope, but was too rushed for my liking. Everything has been resolved too quickly. But this is just my opinion.

Overall, this was a nice, enjoyable read, but obviously not my favorite second chance romance I've read so far.

Jaidee says

4.5 "over the moon with swoon!" stars

2015 Honorable Mention Read

I cannot believe how much I cried and smiled with this sweet contemporary romance.

This book came in my e-mail box last week from my first love when I was sixteen. She wrote some very sweet words and ended by saying that this book made her feel so young and in love (which we were for the year she was visiting from Czechoslovakia). We are still the best of friends and have been there for each other through severe illnesses, divorces and other heartaches. My first love became my best friend.

This book took me back to those carefree teenage days. The heady intoxication of care, passion and the belief that the world was a wondrous place. Gracie and Matty in the book "was us" and also anybody that has been in a loving and compassionate relationship.

I loved Ms. Carlino's easy breezy writing style that felt so light yet so full of genuine emotions. I cried with much joy thinking of my beautiful girl from Prague that shared herself with me for a year of pure joy, fun, intense conversation and adolescent lovemaking. The sweet blonde pixie who loved her teddy bear (her nick for me) and continues to do so.

Most importantly though this book brought gratitude to my heart for the life I have now. My boyfriend said I have not kissed him this often in the past week (while reading this book) since we first met six years ago. I am grateful to that pretty pixie girl who taught me how to love at the age of 16 and now to the beautiful man that loves me unconditionally at my old age of 44.

Ms. Carlino thank you for this lovely romance.

Aj the Ravenous Reader says

""From the time you're born, you have no control; you can't choose your parents, and, unless you're suicidal, you can't choose your death. The only thing you can do is choose the person you love, be kind to others, and make your brutally short stint on earth as pleasant as possible."

After this first Renee Carlino read, I'm an instant fan!

Grace and Matt first met as senior university students- best friends turned lovers. Each a perfect half of one perfect heart, torn apart by time and fate but chanced upon each other by the same twisted fate fifteen years later! Does this mean a second chance for "the one that got away" or just a long overdue closure? **Oh my feels!**

Read the book! Read the book! Read the book! You hear me? READ.THE.BOOK!

Matt and Grace are adorable people. Matt's unrelenting love and beautiful personality with his incredible talent in creating photos that have a story telling quality is impressive. Grace's selflessness is endless and awe-inspiring. Her passion for music and devotion for her family (no matter what the cost) will make your heart burst. It's really hard to point out flaws. It's hard to tell which of them was wrong because really, they're both just victims of wrong timing and an evil scheming witch named Elizabeth.

The story, written with comfortable ease and gracefulness is like the perfect blend of the most wonderful elements taken from books I adore without coming off as an imitation. The younger version of the characters reminded me so much of the adorable Dylan and Gray of First Comes Love series. The plot kind of reads a little like that of Love, Rosie only so much better and the element of music made me think of Where She Went. In short, it's an unforgettably beautiful book you won't be able to put down once you've begun.

The story broke my heart in the most beautiful ways (if that was possible) without being mean or tragic or dramatic. It's raw and natural and true, it hurts. Somebody, please gag me now before I spill the entire story.

Thanks for the wonderful, wonderful recommendation, Arch. You can read his beautiful review [here](#).

Angela says

"she was perfect... poetry in motion- the evidence of a life burning well and bright."

I do not say this lightly... This is one of the best contemporary books I've ever read. If you know me, then you know contemporary is my least favorite genre. There are some thing I'd like to clear up right away though. *BWWS* isn't an action packed book with a massive slap you plot twist, and for some reason it is classified in the YA section of the book store. This novel is simply what it says it is, a sweet feel good read, which is one of it's best qualities. Second in my opinion it should be filed under New Adult. It does straddle the line of Ya and Na, but to me it falls into the latter. This is also a plus for this book.

BWWS is a novel following two main characters. Matt who is a photography student and Grace who is a music major. Matt is really starting to discover who he is as an artist when Grace falls into his life. Matt is perfection when it comes to leading males. He is everything we want in a lead while bring something new to a protagonist. He is confident, charismatic, and so sarcastic. Completely loved everything about his character. I liked his charm and was consumed by his thoughts. I loved how he never second guessed who he is as a person. He has easily became one of my all time favorite leading males. Grace however was his opposite. She is confident, but is so clearly closed off. She is broken and lost. The way Matt knows who he is, is the way Grace struggles to feel herself out. As their relationship grows so does both their personalities.

Their relationship y'all, is perfection. It feels so real. You will really feel like you're going through everything with them. Their ups and downs will feel like yours. You will be experiencing all the emotions and pain right along with them, and it's flipping fantastic. The way these two feed off each other is amazing. They had me laughing, grinning, blushing, and breaking my heart. Sometimes all those feelings were happening at the same time. I probably cried ten times while reading this book. I wasn't even half way through and I had cried at least four. These two are a couple from the moment they meet you'll want to have a happy ending. I'm a sucker for books that the couple are friends first (legit friends) then turn into something more. Carlino makes this process seem effortless... Like she was born with a laptop in hand to deliver us friend first romance.

The plot is as I said above, steady. It's not a book where something is just going to jump out at you. This is 100% okay! The pacing was completely fine for me. I usually hate the mild speed of contemporary books, but not with *BWWS*. Their journey is sweet and perfectly timed. I was super worried reading because the first half the book was so strong, I feared the last half wouldn't live up. I thought the jump from past to present would do the same. I was taken back when neither of these things turned me off. I wont however lie to you... **YOU WILL KNOW WHAT IS COMING!!!** I saw it coming the moment it was winked at, I thought this would in the long run make me lower my rating. **NOPE.** When it happens and everything comes to light I was still (continued to be) a big blubbering mess. **Not exaggerating at all... mess like-sitting in the middle of my bed, wrapped up like a burrito, using the bottom of my shirt as a tissue with no shame-mess.**

Before We Were Strangers was a very pleasant surprise. I definitely under estimated how much this book was going to effect me. A book I simply thought would be a fill-in read till I figured out what I wanted to really dive into next. Turned out to be a huge punch to my heart. Anything that might be considered a "flaw" is wiped away by the pure beauty of Carlino's writing and by the way she will pull you into this love story. **A book where the romance scenes are soul warming and the love feels authentic. Carlino takes us on an emotional rollercoaster of a read, and doesn't miss a chance at pulling at our heartstrings. Before We Were Strangers is the definition of "all the feels".**

READ THIS REVIEW AND OTHERS OVER ON OUR BLOG:

**SBSR SBSR SBSR
SBSR SBSR SBSR**

SBSR SBSR SBSR

Just a little side-note too, I thought the cover and title of this book were gorgeous but after reading it realize just how amazing they really are.
