



Accidentally in Love
Spicy Love in New York

J.P. Garland

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A
Romance
Novella

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Part 1: Peter and Amy

1. The Peter Edgar

PETER EDGAR WAS VERY rich. And because he was very rich, he was very famous. The money and the fame were not truly his. They came from his father. Michael Edgar had helped form and was a major initial shareholder in a start-up that exploded. He was worth half-a-billion dollars (plus or minus) when he and his wife/Peter's mother died in the crash of a Gulfstream G650 on its approach to the Aspen Airport in Colorado. There were no survivors.

Their only son, Peter, was 27 at the time. After graduating from Princeton with a degree in history, he was toiling away as an analyst in a small tech firm that occupied two floors in converted space in Manhattan's Meatpacking District. It was a good gig, and Peter enjoyed it.

Then his parents died and he was very rich. Change, though, began slowly. Acquaintances from Princeton came out of the woodwork and he found himself enjoying the lifestyle of a young, handsome rich eligible Manhattan bachelor. He was footing the bill for elaborate parties and table service and slid easily into the house in East Hampton that overlooked the Atlantic itself.

With his new money, he moved from the SoHo loft his father had bought for him as part of a graduation present to an old-school five bedroom on the east side of Park Avenue in the mid-70s. He liked the old-world feel of the place's dark wood and leather chairs and especially the library, right out of Austen with a moveable ladder along a rail along the shelves but with recessed lighting and comfortable chairs. The apartment's prior occupant was an old-school banker who took a flier with Bernie Madoff and ironically—since he was an old-school banker—lost everything. Peter bought it in a bankruptcy sale.

With the sudden money came a sudden love life. He'd never been adept with women and rarely dated. Now, though his love life would be described as very full or very empty, depending on the describer. The scion of another new-money family became his sherpa, and he entered into the world of galas and charity fetes with the requisite beautiful if manufactured woman on his arm. They got the chance of getting their

picture in the *Times* or *Vanity Fair* and he got the thrill of being himself seen with a beautiful if manufactured woman. And sometimes he got the thrill of going to bed with one. Nothing was expected to come of any of these liaisons and nothing ever did.

On most weekends, especially around Memorial Day each year, he'd drive his yellow Lambo to the East Hampton mansion. Usually accompanied by hangers on from Princeton and a few from Yale who followed in their own Porsches or BMWs. And with this standing invitation, they'd party and get drunk and/or high and get laid before recovering enough to drive back to the city on Sunday night.

That was the plan one Friday in August. He was still working at XTach even with his windfall to give himself something to do, but Fridays were half-days. He'd leave at around noon, cab home, get fully casual, and head east starting with the Triboro Bridge and ending at his place on the ocean not far from Georgica Cove.

At about eleven that day, though, a Code Red shot through the firm, and an all-hands meeting was held in the conference room.

A bug found in beta testing could delay the roll-out planned for the company's updated flagship product, which was due to be released right after Labor Day. All-hands-on-deck!

Peter, in the marketing department, wouldn't have much to say or do, but he decided it would be unseemly, though no one said it, to be in his infinity pool in the Hamptons while the engineers and coders were surviving on stale pizza and cold coffee.

So he stayed. He texted his band of buddies. He was stuck in town, but they were free to go out to the house, which had been thoroughly cleaned after the prior weekend's *festivities*. They knew where the key was hidden and what the security code was.

He got into the office at about nine on Saturday carrying his morning brew and was met with chaos. Clusters of engineers were spread about the open floor, some doing coding and others testing each new line.

There wasn't much that he could do, and he kept to the periphery browsing on his phone. Which was pretty much what the other non-essential employees on hand were doing.

Then like a miracle someone shouted, "I got it."

She sent the revised code to the testers and received a *so far so good* from the department head. The fix was tested in the situation that had led to the breach found in the original beta testing, but it held.

Peter called a nearby and very popular craft brewery on Hudson and he grabbed a large room on the second floor and rewarded everyone who'd done the real work of saving the update. It was nearly seven when he flagged down a cab and walked in a somewhat wobbly manner passed the doormen, who nodded, and to the elevator that opened directly into his apartment.

He found the rare night at home relaxing and dozed away in one of the comfortable leather chairs in the old-banker's old-school library lined with shelf upon shelf of unread and unopen volumes with its view to the similarly pretentious building across East 74th Street.

2. Accident

IT WAS AN ACCIDENT. She had stopped to adjust her grip on her bag. He walked right into her. “Fuck” is what she said. “Fuck” is what she said at him. At Peter, rich and famous Peter. She turned to glare at him, in his tailored khaki pants and blue Brooks Brothers polo shirt. Brown loafers without socks. He, Princeton Class of ‘07, could offer nothing to this onslaught but: “Oh. I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.”

She—her name is Amy Reid—said, a bit sarcastically, “It’s okay. I probably shouldn’t have just stopped in the middle of the sidewalk. Are *you* okay?” And he said, “Really, I’m fine.” He droned on, not knowing what exactly he was saying but knowing that he had to keep saying it or she’d walk away. She in her tight jeans, vintage t-shirt, and trainers.

“Look,” his stream of words now under some control, “can I, I don’t know, buy you a coffee?”

She looked at him. “Coffee?” She took a small step back and exaggerated looking him over. “Why not? There’s a Starbucks a block east.” He nodded, and she finished with, “Let’s go. But let’s be clear. I pay for mine.” It was clear from his outfit that he was loaded—which didn’t explain why he was still in town on an August weekend—but she was no charity case.

On arrival at Starbucks, he got on line while she went to the bathroom, after telling him what she wanted and handing him a five-dollar bill. When she returned, he was standing where one adds milk and sugar and grabs napkins.

He slid her straight coffee to her, saying, “I don’t know how you take it.” She added milk and one sugar, and they turned, waiting for a table. He gave her her change. When a table was cleared a minute or so later, they took it and sat by the window. He realized that she had no idea who he was. She hadn’t noticed that other people were looking at him and some were taking selfies with him in the background.

Amy had no idea who he was. She didn’t read *The Post* and skipped *The Times’s* society pages. And she was a Luddite when it came to computers; she knew nothing of his father.

Peter was about 5’ 10”. Slim, maybe 160 lbs., the result of regular trips to the gym supplemented with running laps around Central Park on weekends while in town and on the quiet roads of East Hampton when there. His hair was light brown and a bit curly. He kept it a little

longer than most of his peers. His eyes were of an indeterminate color, somewhere between blue and green. Maybe aqua. His watch was a simple digital thing from Timex, though he had a Rolex that was his dad's, which he sometimes wore with a tux.

Peter and Amy chatted quietly and effortlessly while they nursed their coffees. This was unusual for both. Peter, notwithstanding his notoriety, was by nature shy. Amy was too, with only a few close friends and not that many acquaintances.

Eventually, the pair noticed people staring at them. It wasn't because, or not *entirely* because, of his celebrity. They were sitting at a table by the window and their cups were long empty. They were chastened by this *faux-pas* and gathering their cups and napkins and stirrers and, brushing the table off with a napkin, they put the remains into a receptacle and stood on the sidewalk at 77th Street and Lexington Avenue.

They exchanged numbers and agreed to meet the following Sunday at the same Starbucks. Peter thought he might ask her to go for dinner before that. If it meant staying in the city, well, that didn't seem so bad.

3. Monday

IT WAS RAINING ON Monday as Amy ran to the subway. An August rain and a wet dress and moisture as she stood on the Number 6 train towards Grand Central.

Amy was shorter than average, lighter than average, and her eyesight was far beneath the average, salvaged only by contacts. Her face was round and her hazel eyes set a hair closer to one another than average. Her lips were slightly large. And inviting. Her hair was light brown and long. On the whole, it was an above-average face. She had a row of three piercings on her left ear and two on her right. She was an example of the whole being greater than the sum of her parts.

She was also very smart. She worked in a public-relations firm with an office several blocks south of Grand Central, on Park Avenue, and she lived alone in a one-bedroom apartment in a pre-War building on the corner of 76th Street and Lexington. She graduated from a small liberal-arts college in Purchase, New York in Westchester, the suburb just north of the city where she grew up as an only child.

She wasn't a big fan of Mondays and a look around the car showed she wasn't alone in this. A couple of girls in Catholic school uniforms gabbed half-way down the car but as for the rest, it was a universe of people sitting or holding onto whatever could be held onto, most either with half-closed eyes or half-thought thoughts.

At Grand Central, Amy followed a school or gaggle or whatever it's called of fellow travelers out of the car—"getting off!"—and then up the stairs to 42nd Street and from there the two blocks down Park Avenue, sheltered by her tiny umbrella, to her office where, after locating her ID card, she was through a turnstile and then leaned against the back of the elevator. It whisked her to her office on the 23rd floor, to Enswich & Taylor, her PR firm.

This is how work began. Once she got her coffee and sat at her desk and dabbed what she could with a paper towel in the ladies', the angst of her commute dissipated. Amy loved her job. She liked the people with whom she worked; most were smart and pleasant and they shared an all-in-it-together attitude. She liked the outsiders with whom she interacted; most at about her level of responsibility and at her stage in the food chain of their respective companies. She liked the work itself.

She lost herself in that work and when she looked up from her computer it was already 11. She stood and looked out her window and saw that the rain had stopped. It would be dry enough, if a bit muggy, for lunch in Bryant Park. She sometimes went to lunch alone, and that's what she did this Monday. She carried her tablet and grabbed a salad—where she selected the toppings and dressing—carrots, green peas, chickpeas, and kidney beans with balsamic-vinaigrette—and headed two-and-a-half blocks west till finding a small table on the southern side of the Park. Before opening the bag, she sat and took a minute to savor the diversity walking through. She liked being one not-particularly-significant character in midtown.

She took out her lunch and water but not her tablet. Instead of reading, she found herself staring across the green lawn that dominated the Park. Thinking of the man she met the day before. There was something about him. He was self-effacing yet confident. Average looking, yes, but his pieces fit very well together. She imagined they—she and he—could fit well together. She thought him handsome, in his own way. Peter Edgar.

There was, though, something familiar about him. His name? He said little about his background: growing up in California, going to Princeton. His parents dead in a plane crash. Working in a tech company.

It was, she remembered, when he started about his job that his eyes lit up. Something in the tech field, but he made clear that he was no tech guy. Instead, the evolving Peter said he thought he could add something valuable on the business side. He told her of the all-hands-on-deck meeting on Saturday and spent time describing it. She enjoyed hearing this, and his enthusiasm for it.

There was something about Peter Edgar that drew her in. She liked him. She had a few boyfriends over the years, none lasting more than three or four months, and she enjoyed the sex she experienced with, she counted, three of them. As she looked over the green lawn in Bryant Park, her mind drifted to whether she would enjoy spending time with Peter. It was a crazy thought and she put a fork-full of romaine lettuce and kidney beans in a vinaigrette dressing in her mouth and chomped it as if she were an absent-minded horse and then did the same with another fork-full, although now with a couple of chickpeas too.

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Still. It gnawed at her. Something familiar. She finished her salad and walked around the Park until heading back to her office.

4. Peter

ABOUT A MILE AWAY, Peter was on his second slice of pizza. XTach ordered pies for everyone for having worked through Friday's and Saturday's crisis. It was all-hands-with-the-pizza.

He hadn't slept well. When he got home on Sunday afternoon, he'd booted up his laptop and did some sleuthing. His subject: Amy Reid. And he found...virtually nothing. As far as he could tell, zero Facebook or Twitter presence. He got some basics via LinkedIn: Graduate of Manhattanville College, 2009, BFA, Art History. That put her two years younger than him. Worked at Enswich & Taylor.

This checked out with what she told him, but that was all he could find. No picture to refresh his memory of what she looked like. Not that he needed one.

5. Thursday

ON THURSDAY, AMY and Sarah Eckard, a co-worker, headed to Bryant Park for lunch. A beautiful not-too-hot, not-too-humid day. Amy mentioned meeting a guy she might like. One she hoped to see again.

The two found a pair of empty chairs and a table near the Park's lawn. Amy said he was called Peter Edgar. Sarah stopped taking her salad from its bag.

"*The Peter Edgar?*"

"Just Peter Edgar as far as I know. Why?"

This last was lost to Sarah. She pulled her phone out and started touching its screen. After about thirty seconds she held it up to her companion and said, "Is this him?"

"Yeah, that's him. Why?"

"Amy, I love you but you really need to get out more." Her fingers were rocketing across the screen. "Read this."

Taking the phone, Amy saw a Wikipedia entry. For *the Peter Edgar*. Scooting to Personal Information, she read, "A real catch, he is known for being a ladies' man although learning who his particular *femme de jour* is has long proved difficult. He hasn't been connected to any one woman in particular. He is seen almost weekly being adorned with a celebrity or model at one of Manhattan's or the Hamptons' charity fetes."

Sarah grabbed her phone back. After several moments, she said, "Oh, shit" and handed the phone to Amy. Who saw a photo of herself sitting with Peter at Starbucks on Sunday. It linked to a Page Six story: "*The One? Peter Edgar gazing longingly into the eyes of an unknown 'companion' at a Starbucks on Lex this past Sunday. Is it finally 'her'?*"

Amy practically threw the phone back at Sarah and looked around the Park, scanning for eyes that identified her as "her." What if someone came up to her to ask? New Yorkers wouldn't do that—they'd just stare—but who knows with bridge-and-tunnel types or tourists? Grabbing her still-unopened lunch bag, she leaped up and in a rush hurried to 40th Street so she could get out of the public's glare, feeling eyes upon eyes upon eyes feasting on her. Sarah, who found it amusing but knew her shy friend didn't, pulled her own things together and raced after her.

Meanwhile, eighteen blocks to the south, Peter Edgar was having difficulty concentrating. Which was strange. He had long been able to compartmentalize, to perform the task-at-hand without regard for interruptions. It was a useful skill, particularly when one's office is a cubicle among a swarm of coding bees.

His reputation was the opposite of "well-earned." He did attend soirees almost weekly—in Manhattan, in the Hamptons—buying a table more often than not so he and his cronies could play grown-up. For Peter, such an invitation was irresistible to many types of women, offering as it did the near certainty of getting a photo taken and the prospect of it appearing in the next day's paper, in a fashionista's blog, or, possibly, as a trending topic on Instagram.

Peter was born in Minnesota but moved to California when his dad got a position at a large tech firm. His dad, with a couple of engineers, split off to develop their own software. They caught a right-place/right-time wave and his dad, the businessman/salesman of the three, made it into a multi-billion-dollar juggernaut.

Peter grew up outside of San Jose. His dad was always working, and his mom was always attentive. He wasn't a social creature growing up. In his private high school, he was just another kid of someone who worked in tech and made tons of money. Like his father, he wasn't particularly comfortable with coding, the coin of the realm there. He found himself falling in and out of passions. Video games, grunge, chess. He threw himself into them but withdrew when the initial enthusiasm turned to boredom. He barely tolerated participating in the required sports.

Princeton wasn't so different. Lots of students similar to those in high school. He majored in political science, largely after excluding the alternatives. But he was a nice enough guy and got along with others in his dorm so that when he was a junior, he made it into one of the school's selective eating clubs. It was there that he became friends with most of the fellows with whom he hobnobbed when he moved to New York. Most of them were "in banking," a broad description that covered a multitude of jobs and for these Princeton grads not too much effort or time.

For Peter, after graduation, things continued pretty much as they had. He got his XTach job—his dad had a large stake in the company—and moved into a nice two-bedroom apartment in the East 70s between

First and Second Avenues. He joined the Princeton Club on West 43rd Street, often walking there to eat alone at its bar before catching a cab home.

Things changed in some ways but not in others when his parents died in the Gulfstream crash. That was after his dad's company's IPO. Peter was able to convert a lot of the stock into cash. His net worth was somewhat over \$500 million. Not enough to make the *Forbes* 400 but plenty. Enough to get his own Wikipedia entry.

Suddenly he wasn't eating alone at the Princeton Club. The friends with whom he hung out after graduation were letting him pick up the check, too often ordering champagne at the private clubs to which they were admitted. In the city and, after Peter bought the house in East Hampton, out there. He started with his appearances at charity events, and being accompanied by tall, beautiful women.

He didn't realize it at the time, though, but Peter was growing up, from being a twenty-nine-year-old, very rich frat boy with a bunch of similarly situated, though not-as-rich, frat boys. That weekend in town led to one of those evolutionary changes, where suddenly a new species appears. It began with Saturday's all-hands meeting at the office. It let him avoid a party in East Hampton, a brunch in Water Mill, and another weekend much like all the others. Instead, he enjoyed his little brunch at the small French place on 79th Street he didn't go to as often as he liked. And, of course, he ran into Amy Reid.

While the past may be prologue for some, it was something that Peter Edgar hoped to escape.

Long a man without passion, he thought about that. He remembered his past, some parts more clearly than others. Most importantly, he reflected as all of this ricocheted around his head until they landed squarely on Amy. Amy Reid. BFA from Manhattanville. Completely indifferent to the fact that Peter Edgar had a BA from Princeton and oblivious to the fact that Peter Edgar was Peter Edgar.

At that precise moment, Amy and Sarah sat in the corner office of Evan Taylor. He, being of the any-publicity-is-good-publicity school, was amused. After Amy explained her fears, though, he realized it was the last thing that she should be put through. The first step was to get Amy into a safe space. Physically and mentally. He suggested that she call Peter.

Peter answered on the third ring. He was in his cubicle and asked her to hold while he hurried into a small conference room where he could close the door. The pleasantness of the surprise quickly turned to despair as she explained what she was going through. He was an idiot. He was often followed and tracked and written about. He hadn't thought what being innocently thrown into his world would mean to someone else. The women seen on his arm knew what they were doing in becoming connected to him, and he and they played along. It was a game. Everyone knew it was a game. It sold papers. It was a game to everyone, apparently, but this woman.

Evan told Amy to stay home until Monday. He spoke to Peter and a car was sent to pick her up and take her home. Evan knew it was overdramatic, but it would help her calm down. Peter was in the backseat of the car. He apologized and apologized as they were driven up the East Side. He didn't know what more he could say and could only just manage "goodbye" as she got out and he headed back to XTach.

Step Two of the plan Peter and Evan devised was simple. Peter made sure to be seen that night with a willing brunette and with that the waters concerning Amy Reid calmed. No, Amy was, Page Six reported, not "her."

6. Changes

THE THING WAS, as we saw, Peter wasn't "him" anymore. It wasn't simply running into Amy. It was the rare weekend of being on his own in the city while his normal crew and hangers-on were out on the Island. After that, the cold kitchen and the unread-book-laden library weren't so dreary. He had this big, empty apartment and he began to like it. He started to take his Central Park and Hamptons runs more seriously, making them harder but more satisfying.

He fulfilled his big-name obligations when in the Hamptons and into the fall, when events were held midweek in Manhattan. There was always a tall woman who wanted to be seen, and photographed, with *the* Peter Edgar on the red carpet. Peter hadn't abandoned his prior life. He just spent less of his life in it. Enough to keep inquiring eyes away as it was enough occasionally for the Paparazzi to get their photos and the gossipers their stories.

The East Hampton house wasn't closed up in October, contrary to what he told everyone. Peter drove out, alone, every few weeks and as with his apartment he enjoyed the emptiness. He savored the solitude of the house and of his now headphoneless runs and that he was thinking about things—where he had been, where he was, where he was going—more than he ever had.