

REDEMPTION

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Introduction

THIS STORY IS in two parts.

Part one centers on the relationship between Peter Edgar and Amy Reid, with a few detours along the way.

Part two is about Bridget Casey and Evelyn Manners, and others in Peter and Amy's world. **The story contains a few explicit scenes of both straight and lesbian sex.**

Part 1

1.

PETER EDGAR WAS RICH. More than comfortably rich. Well more.

He'd grown up as the second son and last child of Michael and Carly Edgar in a wealthy San Francisco suburb. He was two years younger than his brother Ted.

Being second, though, was a safe place to be. His brother had a natural charm and athleticism. By high school, he'd become the handsome one with a good head for figures. For all that, he was never an asshole and when necessary protected his more introverted younger brother. He followed in their father's and his mother's footsteps and went to Stanford.

Although Peter did not appreciate it at the time, when Ted carried the family name to college in Palo Alto, he had the freedom to go elsewhere. Elsewhere turned out to be Morningside Heights in Manhattan. There, Peter settled comfortably at Columbia College, majoring in history.

That was where matters stood with the Edgar clan until Peter was a sophomore. That's when things changed wildly. Years earlier, his father had been recruited by some Stanford classmates to leave his cushy job at the venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz and throw his lot in with a start-up. They were engineers and he was a finance geek and they built that new company, Palix Corp., into a unicorn, that is, a company with a billion-dollar valuation.

When it went public, Michael Edgar suddenly was beyond rich. Peter had by then gotten his BA at Columbia and his brother Ted was doing very well with his own Stanford MBA at a San Francisco hedge fund.

Peter's parents were indulgent enough to have paid his tuition and expenses at Columbia and to have bought him a two-bedroom condo apartment in a high rise at the corner of East 70th and First Avenue. On his own merits, he got an analyst's job at XTach, yet another start-up, this one with its headquarters in Manhattan's Meatpacking District downtown.

And there matters stood for Peter Edgar as he grew into his position at the company. He soon joined XTach's tradition of four or five officemates heading out after work to a tavern on 13th Street for burgers and fries and Brooklyn-brewed beers. In early March 2019 when Peter had been at the company for almost a year, four of them were at a round table with their IPAs waiting for their burgers when a breaking news story appeared on those of the muted TV monitors spread about the restaurant and bar that were not showing ESPN.

It was a video of a fire truck, one of those yellow airport ones, spraying foam on the wreckage of a jet. The chyron read that it was an accident in Aspen. *No survivors. Cause unknown* ended the message which appeared again and again beneath the wreckage footage and talking heads on CNBC.

Peter and the others stared at it and were chilled by the hope no one had suffered too much before they died. That's when their food arrived, and they turned their now more sober attention to that and to the second round of the Brooklyn Brews they'd ordered.

About ten minutes later, Peter felt a hand on his shoulder. He looked up and saw their boss.

"Peter," he said, "can I have a word?" His voiced was missing the natural confidence it normally had. A very discombobulated Peter followed him, each of his colleagues glad it wasn't them, to a small alcove near the

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front door where a stranger in a suit and tie stood stiffly watching the two men approach.

“Are you Peter Edgar?” he asked. Peter said he was.

The stranger discreetly displayed an NYPD Detective shield and said point blank, “there’s no easy way to say this, sir, but your parents and your brother were killed in that plane crash in Aspen.” He nodded toward the scene of the Colorado runway playing on CNBC with cuts to talking heads in a studio.

2.

IT HAD BEEN THE family's leased Gulfstream G650. The NTSB concluded that the jet had caught a sudden windshear on its final approach to the Aspen Airport. Peter's parents and his brother as well as his brother's partner (who Peter was looking forward to meeting when the family came to New York in early June) were among the seven who died on impact. *God, those final moments* haunted Peter, especially in the silence before he finally fell asleep each night.

But needs must. Peter took two weeks' bereavement leave to bury his family excepting his father's mother, who lived in a Marin County nursing home. Grandma Edgar walked through the horrible funeral service with its three coffins in the church in Palo Alto. She gripped Peter's arm and the two of them walked slowly to the gravesite following the train of hearses. The cemetery was outside San Francisco.

The next day, Peter met with the family's lawyers in the city itself.

He was informed that he was suddenly very wealthy. It'd be a while before the formalities were completed but when they were, in addition to the generous trust fund established for Grandma Edgar, Peter would have hundreds of millions in liquid assets and own a house in Palo Alto, a Georgian townhouse in London's Belgravia, and two additional properties in New York.

The first New York place was a five-bedroom condo on the ninth floor of a pre-war building on the east side of Park Avenue in the seventies. The other was the modern place in East Hampton on New York's Long Island that a Madoff victim had put up. It had a view over the beach and

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to the Atlantic and even a thirty-step staircase that went from its deck to the beach itself. After Peter's parents had bought it, the family regularly held get togethers there and it was where Peter took some of his vacation time.

Once he got titles, Peter sold the California place but kept the others. He moved the few blocks to the big place on Park. He upgraded his wardrobe and found a bespoke tailor on the second floor of a French boutique on Madison Avenue and a custom shoemaker a few blocks south of that. And he flew Grandma Edgar to an exclusive care facility in Bridgehampton, only a few miles from the house.

He made a point of visiting her every few weeks. It was a fine, private facility, and his grandmother had what amounted to her own little hotel suite. She made an effort to waddle out with her walker as much as she could, including for daily meals and evening entertainments. Often, she went alone with her podcasts and audiobooks to one of the chairs that were sprinkled about the enclosed courtyard where visitors would sit with residents, as Peter often did with her.

She was happy there, or at least as happy as someone in her limited physical condition could be even though her old friends, those who were still alive, were all out in northern California where she and her husband had raised Michael, their only son, who was such a point of pride when he'd gotten into Stanford. And that pride extended to both of her grandsons and their academic and other achievements. Her great regret was that she was running out of friends to show pictures to.

As for the family's Columbia grad, he still worked at XTach after he became wealthy. While a few of his professional colleagues suddenly discovered that they had a great friendship with the analyst, most of his true friends had the *that's-cool* attitude about Peter so things with them changed remarkably little, although those closest to

him did not object when Peter insisted on picking up the check when they all went out.

Peter had been keeping a utilitarian dark gray Audi Q5 in a garage near his building for ease of heading east, but with some measure of guilt he decided to splurge. The result was a dark blue Aston Martin DB11 convertible with a deep cream interior and a special-order mustard yellow Porsche Cayenne with a black interior. Suddenly, most weekends found him driving one or the other the hundred miles or so to the Hamptons house. The poor Audi became the house car.

The sizes of the house and the apartment were sometimes disconcerting to Peter. They heightened the loneliness he sometimes felt, especially when he sat on the Hamptons deck overlooking the Atlantic and lost himself in the roar of the waves hitting the sand in thoughts of what was to come.

He missed his family. He'd reminisce out loud about the times he sat on this deck with his parents and Ted in these same comfortable chairs under the same shielding umbrella and the expensive vintage reds being swirled in a glass. It was then, more than at any other times, that he struggled, never not noticing the irony of it all, of him owning all of this because they were gone.

He began ferrying friends he had picked up at work in the Porsche for week-ends in his little slice of Paradise. And they were good friends who teased him about continuing to work when he could spend his time at the beach or in the elite neighborhoods and restaurants of London or pretty much anywhere else he wanted to go with pretty much any gorgeous woman he wanted to go—or *come*, one friend said naughtily—with.

Peter laughed it off but in the end it highlighted how uncertain he was about what he wanted to do with his life.

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Back in Manhattan, he had easily slipped into the life of a rich New Yorker existing on family wealth. He, or more precisely his money and passably good looks, attracted the attention of tall, beautiful single women who, as Austen would have put it, were themselves in want of a wealthy husband. As a rule, one such lady accompanied him on the charity fund raisers at the museums and ballrooms that littered Manhattan and were sprinkled about Brooklyn and the in-season ones in the mansions in the ~~more~~ most exclusive communities in the Hamptons to which he was suddenly invited. It wasn't long before his presence on the A-list circuit received attention in *The Times* and *The Post* and in innumerable gossip blogs and Instagram posts. Even *The Wall Street Journal* wanted to do a piece on New York's *sudden socialite*, but he declined the interview request.

He might not be particularly happy but he was never alone.

Then in August about a year-and-a-half after the Gulfstream crash, an awful weather forecast deterred his usual trip to East Hampton. He substituted a rain-soaked Saturday six-mile run on the Central Park Drive and spent the afternoon doing some reading in his apartment before buying an overpriced ticket for an off-Broadway show he'd wanted to see. He enjoyed it.

He got home early and, alone, microwaved something Mexican from the freezer to keep body and soul together. With that done, he poured himself a couple of fingers of Johnnie Walker Black over ice in an etched Waterford crystal tumbler and settled into the library.

The old room had become his refuge. His father had never gotten around to upgrading it, though he had for most of the apartment's other rooms, the library and, strangely, master bedroom being the exceptions. Those other rooms would make a fine house porn spread in

Architectural Digest, the library would fit perfectly into *American Heritage*. The Gilded Age issue.

It retained the *faux* charm of a Belgravian gentleman's sanctuary. Shelf after shelf of unopened leather-bound books, the walls painted a hunter's green. The antique sense of most of the shelves was broken only by several filled with modern and recent editions that he actually read.

The most attractive spot in the room was a window that looked out over 75th Street with a cushioned windowseat and a pair of wingback chairs on either side and a small, mahogany scalloped table between them.

Peter, that night, put his Scotch-filled Waterford on a coaster on the table before taking a turn around the room in the slight illumination of wall sconces. Here and there he slid a volume out. There was no dust; the cleaning crew that came in every Tuesday and Friday made sure to dust in the unlikely event that someone would actually remove a book.

He carried one of those recent novels, one he'd ordered after a fawning review on the front page of *The Times Book Review*, to the wing chair to the left of the window but when he'd settled into the too comfortable chair, he put the volume on his lap and let his mind wander outside. The storm had passed. The Manhattan sky never truly turns black, and that night it had an inky darkness with threads of magically illuminated clouds racing west-to-east.

In the morning, the sky was clear and very blue. The temperature was already in the low 80s, but the dank humidity of Saturday was gone. Clarity and clearness remained in its wake. After another six-mile loop of the Park and a shower, Peter headed out for a lone brunch at a small place on the south side of 79th. It was all part of his normal routine when he was alone in the city for the weekend.

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3.

AMY ELIZABETH REID HAD absentmindedly stopped in the middle of the Park Avenue sidewalk about a block north of Peter's condo to adjust the grip on her bag when he plowed right into her.

She turned to glare at the asshole who'd nearly knocked her to the ground even as he reached to stabilize her. They faced each other.

She did not recognize him, notwithstanding his notoriety in the society pages of the high-brow and low-brow publications and websites that were the lifeblood of curious New York.

What she saw instead was a more than marginally handsome man, five-ten and well-built in tailored khaki pants with a well-defined crease and a blue Brooks Brothers polo. Brown Italian loafers without socks and a worn blue Columbia cap. She liked what she could see of his hair. It was a dark brown with a bit of curl and long enough to feel playful in one's fingers but not *too* reckless. He quickly removed his Wayfarers.

What *he* saw was a more than marginally pretty twenty-something in a yellow sundress with flickers of red and blue flowers on green stems. Her light brown hair was in a ponytail corralled by a red hair band.

When they had both regained their bearings and stood facing each other, they exchanged simultaneous apologies.

"Don't be daft," she said. "I was the idiot who just stopped."

"No, no. I was scrolling and not paying attention. It was my bad." Peter continued. "Look. Can we settle this at brunch?"

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"That's your pick-up line?" she asked with a grin. "How's that running into women on the sidewalk thing working for you?"

Seeing his reaction to this tease, she quickly added, "Just kidding. I'd love to but I don't have time."

"Some other time, maybe," he said, but she quickly said she'd be happy to share a quick coffee. After he took a look at the empty ring finger on her left hand, a peek that she noticed, they agreed to something at the Starbucks a block east on Lexington.

The walk itself proved a delight. They went side-by-side, a close but appropriate distance between them. She found out how long he'd lived in Manhattan and he found out the same about her. He found out that she worked in a PR firm in midtown and she learned that he worked at a tech start-up in the Meatpacking District though, he hastened to add, he was not himself a tech guy. "Just a BA in history," he admitted.

The Starbucks itself was typically crowded for a Sunday morning, and after she'd gotten her latte and he'd picked up a straight coffee, they had to wait a few minutes, nervously rocking slightly as they did, until a table by the window overlooking 77th Street opened up.

The store was its standard-issue dark with the smell—or *aroma?*—of bitter caffeine and the constant din of patrons and baristas wafting around and people waiting to use the bathroom. As for Amy and Peter, they remained at their table long after their coffees were gone.

They had fallen into a relaxed conversation, one that almost seemed like a catching up between long-lost friends. She told of her local background. Brought up and going to college less than twenty-five miles to the north. Enjoying her work in PR. Her folks still living in Westchester County and her only brother Brian with a Congressional staff position in DC.

He was trying not to boast about his Columbia degree and offered only vague stories of his California background and having lost his parents and only sibling in a plane crash. That last hit her, and she said how sorry she was and they left it at that.

He kept the details of who they were and how they'd died and especially what he'd inherited from the conversation. She plainly had no idea who he was, he realized, and he had no intention of educating her.

Amy didn't notice that her companion had been noticed and that others were taking what they thought were discreet pictures of the person they sort of recognized as being famous for something but not knowing what that might be. Peter was used to the attention. He ignored it. He and Amy, though, could not long ignore the glares directed their way from other customers. Not caring a whit for who they were. Caring about getting their table.

When Amy realized it, she mentioned it to Peter and the pair sheepishly collected their empty cups, used a napkin to tidy up the table, and were soon on the street.

Time had flowed quickly. Too quickly. Amy was shocked that she was already late for the meeting she'd dressed up for. She told Peter she had to be off and after sending an apologetic text to her friend, she stepped onto Lexington Avenue to hail a cab south. One pulled up almost immediately and as he held the door open for her, Peter asked if they might meet for coffee again. To the annoyed impatience of the cabbie, she put her number in his phone and he put his in hers.

"I'd like that," she said as he closed the door.

"I'd like that," he called softly to the taxi as it merged into southbound traffic. And sitting in the back of the cab with her phone cradled in her palm and his number staring back at her, Amy's first thought was that she hoped he'd call. There was something about him. A sweetness. A

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kindness. Sure, he was decked out in high-end clothes on a Sunday morning with a hint of the Eastern establishment with a northern California vibe but he was without pretense.

Yes. She would like to see him again. It wasn't because of his trappings of wealth. She had no idea who he was. She didn't read *The Post* and skipped *The Times's* society page. She was very familiar with social media as part of her job in PR, but the intricacies that seemed to absorb a disproportionate share of the internet world's bandwidth were beyond her. She could literally run into Kim Kardashian's butt on a Park Avenue sidewalk and not have a clue as to who, or what, it was attached to.

4.

WHILE AMY WAS GETTING ready to go to work on Monday, rain started pelting against the window of her one-bedroom midblock walkup on 80th between Second and Third. She generally enjoyed the two mile or so walk south to her office on East 40th, but not in this monsoon. Before leaving, she took a final look at the sky. It was gray on gray and the water was unrelenting as it battered her windows. It was not letting up any time soon.

She threw a rain slicker over her dress and grabbed a too-small retractable umbrella from a hook in the closet by the door and ventured out, leaning forward into the rain as she slogged with a parade of others doing precisely the same along the drenched and puddled sidewalk to the steps that took her to the subway at Lex and 77th Street, right at the corner where the Starbucks stood. The umbrella had done little to protect her so she was left dripping in a dress that was wet below the slicker's protection and drenched sneakers—she'd change at the office—on the southbound Number 6 train towards Grand Central.

As Peter Edgar had observed in his study of her at Starbucks the day before, Amy was shorter than average and lighter than average. Her face was round and her hazel eyes set a hair closer to one another than average. Her lips were slightly large yet had something that made them 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.

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As Peter Edgar had *not* yet had a full opportunity to observe, Amy Reid was also very smart. She worked at her public relations firm since she'd graduated a few years earlier from a small liberal arts college in Purchase, New York in Westchester. It was not far from the suburb just north of the city where she grew up as the only daughter and where she still spent Christmas and Thanksgivings and birthdays, with her parents and usually with her brother Brian, who'd Amtrak up from Washington.

And as Peter Edgar had had the opportunity to observe, she was neither married nor engaged.

But all of that hardly mattered in this Monday's shitty weather. She wasn't a big fan of Mondays as a general rule but even less so in weather like that morning's. She stood in the middle of the southbound subway platform with bits of rain dripping down through the grates along the sidewalk above. It was as close to the tracks as she could get, and there was barely room to breathe as those in the crowd crushed themselves together. Politely.

The first train pulled in. It was far too crowded, though, for any more than twenty or so of those waiting to themselves squeeze on board. As that train pulled away, Amy and the others who'd been left behind filled the space those fortunate ones had vacated. She hoped that the second train would be the charm.

And it was. She was near the car's door when it opened and pushed her way in after those getting out had done so. She turned to get somewhat down the center aisle and with one hand clutched the metal floor-to-ceiling pole. Her hand was joined by several others on the pole, each diplomatically the slightest distance away from the others.

After the familiar *stand clear of the closing doors, please* announcement, the doors did close and the train began to move with a jolt that shook everyone. They were all well

accustomed to the train's launch and they responded like a choreographed flashmob.

Her car fell into its rhythm but only briefly. It had barely gotten up to speed when it began to slow as it entered the 68th Street station, where the same ritual and the same *stand clear of the closing doors, please* announcement that had taken place less than half-a-mile earlier at 77th was repeated. Amy held her position at her pole, doing the subway rider's gyrations to allow people getting off to maneuver around her.

When the trip resumed, she let her mind wander in time with the car's hypnotic movement. It was a quiet, communal car. Almost all of the other riders were doing what she was doing or staring at their tablets or phones except for three girls in Catholic school uniforms who were gabbing at the other end of the car.

After this stop-and-go ritual was repeated at several stations, the train pulled into Grand Central. Amid several shouts of *coming through*, Amy joined the line that left the car and across the damp platform to one of the many staircases that rose up. She climbed the first flight like one of a pack of horny salmon heading upstream. At its top, she joined the mayhem of commuters and students racing in all directions, zigging and zagging around awed tourists to get to the 4, 5, 6, or 7 trains or to rush down a tiled hallway that would bring them to the Shuttle, a train that went back and forth between Grand Central and Times Square, back-and-forth, back-and-forth, all day and all night long.

Through the turnstile using only her hip to push it out of the way, Amy walked up a final flight of steps, dry until nearly the top one, patiently waiting for the three or four ahead of her to get their umbrellas open, as she was to do when her turn came.

The rain was now hard but not as brutal as it had been when she'd hurried from her apartment to the subway and

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she joined the flow south to 40th and after the light on Park changed she walked the block-and-a-half to her building on Madison.

She closed and shook her dripping umbrella. The lobby floor was damp from those who had preceded her. She fished her ID card from her shoulder bag and pushed through a turnstile and onto a thankfully empty elevator that would zip her up to her office on the 23rd floor, to Enswich & Taylor, her PR firm.

This is how work began, though not always in a physical atmosphere as dank and damp as it was that day. Before getting her coffee from the kitchen and bringing it to her cubicle, she went to the ladies' and did what she could with paper towels to rid herself of the rain and sweat that had encased her from the trip.

Not so bad, considering, she told herself when she looked in the mirror, but she'd have to brush out her hair as soon as she could. She settled into her little black chair with a sigh and took her pair of dry work pumps from her drawer and put them on before booting her computer and letting the angst of her short commute dissipate.

Amy loved her job. She liked the people with whom she worked. They were smart and pleasant people from New York and pretty much everywhere else. She liked the work itself.

As she got herself settled in at her desk that Monday, she lost herself in that work and when she looked up from her computer it was already eleven. On the way to getting a coffee refill, she glanced through a conference room window. The rain had stopped. By lunchtime, it'd be dry enough, if muggy, for lunch in Bryant Park.

Bryant Park is the great oasis in midtown Manhattan. Its central lawn spreads out to the west of the library, the one with Patience and Fortitude, its famous lions. That greenery is surrounded by walkways lined with small

green round tables and chairs and, best of all, a potpourri of Manhattan workers who fill them.

With all that rain, it wasn't as crowded as it would normally be on an August Monday at noontime, and the lawn itself was cordoned off because of the wetness. With a salad and the iced tea she'd picked up in a fancy place on Fifth, she wandered in and quickly found a table and dry chair that overlooked the lawn.

Amy allowed her thoughts to wander as she chomped on the greens and beans and other things tossed in her salad, alternating with sips of her iced tea. With the sounds from the other visitors and from traffic passing along 42nd Street muffled in the humid air, she sat in her solitude and her thoughts perhaps inevitably drifted to the stranger she'd met only the afternoon before. To Peter Edgar.

There was something vaguely familiar about him but she couldn't put her finger on it. He was handsome in a spoiled rich kid sort of way yet there was nothing dickish or off-putting about him. To the contrary.

To be sure, Amy didn't have a lot of experience with men, handsome or otherwise. Mark Astor had extended from her final semester at Manhattanville to her early months in the city but his attentions turned to someone he met during orientation for his job at Chase. After him, she'd hooked up now and then with guys she'd met as part of a Thursday night pub crawl she got dragged on with Sarah, a friend from work, and one and sometimes two of Sarah's Sarah Lawrence buddies.

Ray Connors was a little on the short side and had a great sense of humor but he only made it to two months before they began losing interest in one another.

Gerry Phillips was her last relationship that was in any way *serious* but he started emitting bad, controlling vibes after they'd slept together a few times. She started ignoring his calls and texts until she got the courage, or at

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least a piece of courage, to call him and say they should start seeing other people.

Amy was depressed about her prospects. But not so depressed that she didn't enjoy exchanging touches with a sweet young lawyer named Dan three weeks later after they met on one of the Sarah-led crawls she'd skipped when she was exclusive with Gerry. She hadn't yet recovered her confidence in the complicated world of twenty-something singledom in Manhattan and while she was telling herself that she was content to just ride it out and rely on chance, having become fully capable of taking care of certain needs without the necessity of a man's involvement, she could not escape a certain internal gnawing.

This was in the recesses of her mind when Peter Edgar had leapt to its forefront. Something about him ignited something she'd place aside after Gerry. He was self-effacing yet confident. More than average looking, yes, but his pieces fit very well together.

As her thoughts progressed, she found herself imagining how they—she and he—would literally fit well together.

As had happened at the Starbucks on Lex, time had slipped away and she was hit by the reality of having to get back to her office. She took the last of her salad and had a final sip of her iced tea and headed from the park.

5.

PETER SLEPT POORLY THAT Sunday night. It wasn't just the rain that moved in overnight and was splattering against his bedroom windows much as it was doing not so far away at Amy's. No. It was Amy.

As soon as he was home on Sunday afternoon, never having actually gotten brunch, 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 or Instagram presence. He got some basics via LinkedIn: Graduate of Manhattanville College, 2020, BFA, The first Covid year. Art History. That made her two years younger than him. Worked at Enswich & Taylor. He'd never heard of it but got the basics from its website. Small public relations firm that specialized in crisis management. Which he assumed meant fixing inappropriate social media posts or late-night rendezvouses caught in a paparazzo's lens.

Still. That was neither here nor there. That morning, facing the same rain that Amy Reid was dealing with on her hurried walk to the 6 Train, a doorman held a large black umbrella over him and then held open the door of the cab that would take Peter through the chaos of a wet Manhattan rush hour south to XTach's headquarters. Once there, he raced through the rain and was quickly inside. This was hardly the midtown office building with all its security protocols of the sort Amy had to deal with. It was open and industrial in an almost throwback way. Peter took the wide staircase from the lobby two steps at a time to the third floor and the firm's main office.

Once he was settled at his cubicle with a coffee and bagel with cream cheese he got from XTach's small

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kitchen, he chastised himself for having perhaps spent too much time thinking of Amy Reid since he very much doubted that she had given a moment's thought to him. He didn't know her type but was pretty sure he was not hers since he was, more than anything, the asshole who'd bashed into her on the sidewalk. She'd given him her number, but he knew that it was best to wait, if he was going to call her at all. She had *his* number so maybe the better move would be to wait until she called him. He didn't know.

He told himself that he should focus on Thursday's Whitney Museum fund raiser and particularly Cheryl Evans, who a friend had arranged to accompany him to the gala and perhaps for a post-event dinner at his place. The friend had texted Cheryl's photo, and he expected he'd be quite up for a post-gala meal with her.

With that mental clarification and the storm harmlessly in its final throes outside, he was able to enjoy what was another of XTach's traditions. A bunch of pies with a variety of toppings were ordered from a pizzeria on Hudson Street and by noon their boxes were spread next to one another on the large conference room's long credenza that usually witnessed less *fun* lunches. Off to one side was a stack of paper plates and napkins and on the other a collection of sodas and other (non-alcoholic) drinks. Peter loved how the communal meal brought together the disparate parts of the company, even if only for an hour or so.

No one knew that he was funding it all.

6.

NEW YORK'S WEATHER MAY not be as changeable as Dublin's, but it can sometimes give the Irish capital a run for its money. So it was that Tuesday, the sky a brilliant blue and all signs indicating that it would grow into a beautiful not-too-hot, not-too-humid day.

It was quite natural, then, that Amy and Sarah from work would buy their salads at the place on Fifth across from the library and eat in Bryant Park.

After they'd collected their mixed salads and drinks, they followed scores of similar midtowners into the park and were lucky enough to catch a couple leaving a table and chairs in the shade of one of the trees that lined the southern border, within earshot of the melody that played on the nearby carousel. They grabbed it to the consternation of another couple approaching from the west, but a wee bit too far away. Like parking on the street in New York, being close is not good enough.

As Amy and Sarah were sitting down, Amy mentioned with a hint of enthusiasm that she'd met *someone*. It had been a while since she'd said that to anyone, including herself.

"What do you mean *met someone*?" Sarah asked as she arranged her lunch on her side of the green mesh table.

Once Amy had her own salad and iced tea set on the table, she told Sarah about being bumped into by a nice-looking guy on Sunday and enjoying sitting with him at Starbucks for coffees and apologies.

"Holy meet-cute," Sarah said with a laugh. "Tell me about him."

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Amy realized bringing it up was not the smartest thing since nothing was, she knew, going to come of it, but she'd started and was bound to answer Sarah's question.

"He just seems like a really nice guy. Smart. Well dressed. I think he actually listened to what I had to say. Stuff like that."

"The type you'd bring home to your parents?"

"I met him once. Don't start shopping for you maid-of-honor dress just yet."

"Can I at least Google it?"

"Jesus, Sarah," Amy was able to say to her friend.

"Okay, okay." She paused. "Looks?"

"You know I'm not so superficial," Amy said with a sweet laugh. "Seriously, he's a fine specimen of a man."

Now they both laughed.

"He really is." Amy used the plastic fork to take a bite of her salad.

"Honey," Sarah said, her own fork midway between the clear plastic container and her mouth and turning more serious, "you deserve one of the good ones."

Which was true after the stories she'd heard from Amy of some of her prior liaisons, even the longer (in time if not necessarily otherwise) ones, like Gerry. The last weeks with him had been...difficult and the two women often spoke about it and in time were both glad she'd parted ways with him and over more time they reached a consensus that Amy had *dodged a bullet*.

But Gerry was well and forever in her past and, Amy was led to believe, in some other east sider's present. She was strangely excited about talking instead about this stranger who she had passed like he was just another ship in the night.

"You exchanged numbers?" The question brought Amy back to Planet Earth.

Amy admitted that they had.

"Good. So, what's his name and how cute is he?" Sarah asked. She took another bite of her Romaine.

Amy said he was called Peter Edgar and before she could continue, Sarah's fork had dropped into her salad.

"The Peter Edgar?" she asked, looking hard at her friend.

"Just Peter Edgar as far as I know. He's a couple of years older, according to what he told me. Works at some tech company in the West Village. Why?"

Sarah pulled her phone from her bag and her index finger started racing over the screen, her salad ignored. Amy stared at her in confusion. After about thirty seconds, her friend held her phone up, its screen facing Amy, and said, "This him?"

Amy was surprised. "Yeah, that's him. Why?"

"Amy, I love you but you really need to get out more." She pulled her phone back and 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's never been connected to any one woman in particular. He is seen regularly being adorned with a celebrity or model at one of Manhattan's or the Hamptons' charity fêtes."

Sarah turned her phone back to herself. More scrolling. After several moments, she said, "Oh, shit" and again handed the phone to Amy. Who saw a photo of herself sitting with the Peter Edgar at Starbucks on Sunday. It linked to a Page Six story on *The Post's* website:

REDEMPTION

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"?

With a quiet *fuck*, Amy practically threw the phone back at Sarah and looked around the park.

"No. No. No," she repeated when her eyes returned to her slightly eaten lunch. "I don't understand." She looked right at Sarah. "I do not want to be in *The Post*. Ever."

She paused.

"Is there anything I can do? I don't want paparazzi following me around." She scanned all the faces nearby of strangers sitting at tables or walking past oblivious to the little drama being played out at Amy's table. "I don't want strangers to stare at me, pointing to me, hitting me up for money they think I have."

She grabbed her salad and snapped the top on and put the cap on the iced tea and shoved them into the paper bag from the eatery. Before Sarah could react and recover from being stunned by the Page Six photo still on her phone, Amy was up and gone, dropping the lunch bag into a bin by the park's entrance. Her friend caught her just as she'd reached Fifth Avenue. Sarah ran her arm through Amy's and they returned to the office without saying anything to one another.

Meanwhile, a few miles to the south, Peter Edgar himself 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. But he couldn't get that girl out of his head.

He pulled his phone out for the umpteenth time with thoughts of calling her, but he resisted the temptation. In a strange way, he felt that she was out of his league. She was

completely different and by any objective if superficial physical standard was lightyears from the women he'd appeared at events and often hooked up with.

She was completely different from anyone he'd met since becoming rich.

"Yo, Peter," Chris, another analyst called to him. "Check out *The Post*. Page Six."

By the time he had, the other was at his cubicle.

"She's kind of cute, mate," he said. "Anything happening there?"

Peter looked up. "I don't really know her. I ran into her near my apartment, literally, and we just had coffee so we could apologize to each other and then she was gone."

"Tell me you at least got her number."

Peter thought of the entry on his phone. "Yeah, but I probably won't call her. I kind of lied when I didn't tell her how...well off I am."

"I don't know, man. If I had your bank account I'd fucking tattoo it on my forehead." Peter ignored this.

Chris took another look at the photo on his own phone.

"Seriously. I don't know. You both look really relaxed here, like I don't know if I've ever seen you like before. Like old friends. You know?"

"Maybe."

"No *maybe*. Just do it. You can afford to pay for the call." He laughed as he turned to get back to his own desk and Peter wondered if he was right. *What do I have to lose?*

Fuck he thought. He'd made a concerted effort to keep his true identity from her. *Would she think he lied and end it before it got started?*

He went to the conference room where they'd all had that pizza the day before. He closed the door and dialed her number.

"Hi," she said, her voice flat.

"This is Peter, Peter Edgar, from Sunday," he said.

REDEMPTION

"I know. I recognized the number."

There was a pause. A brief one while he mustered his courage, nervous about where this conversation would be going.

She jumped in. "I, you know, I found out about you."

"From *The Post*?"

"Yeah. And then Wikipedia. It was quite revealing."

"I guess I should have told you. I'm sorry that I didn't. And that you got your photo everywhere."

"Look. You couldn't know that someone took that picture or that *The Post* would be interested in it."

"It's now all over the internet," he regretted to say.

"Great. I'm going to be a meme."

She was not happy and it was his fault. She kind of understood but, still, it was all a bit much. Now from what she'd read, he really wasn't much of a celebrity. He'd not done anything to make anyone care the least bit about him except for the accident of being the only surviving child of a wildly rich man who died in a Gulfstream crash on approach to the Aspen Airport.

But he was young enough and handsome enough and available enough to create a swell of envy in man and woman alike so he was going to be a target at least for a while. As he was speaking to Amy, he understood that he had developed a thick skin about it but she'd been thrown straight to the lions and she didn't deserve that.

He ended the call to say he'd try to figure out what to do to protect her.

Amy wasn't waiting. Crisis management, after all, was her job, even a crisis that barely spread beyond one degree of recognition.

Sarah wasn't surprised when Amy looked at her over the cubicle's four-foot wall and said they needed to talk in the privacy of the conference room. Once there, Sarah closed the door.

"It's not good," Sarah said. "The good-old Reddit sleuths have outed you." She turned her tablet so Amy could see. There it was, not only the Starbucks picture but something someone scraped from her Manhattanville yearbook and the stiff one she'd posted on LinkedIn.

"Not your best pictures," Sarah said, attempting without success to lighten the matter.

Amy dropped into one of the conference room's chairs. "I need to speak with Evan," she said. Evan Taylor was their boss.

"We need to," Sarah corrected and within a minute they were both in comfortable chairs in their boss's corner office and Sarah was showing him the details on her tablet.

"Amy," he said when he'd digested what he'd seen. "The most important question is whether you want to try for some sort of relationship with this"—he looked at the article—"Peter Edgar guy. If not, it'll blow over when people realize you are not—what did *The Post* say?"

"The one," Sarah answered.

"Yes. *The one*. A gala with his typical blonde with legs that are forever long and...boobs trying to escape from her cleavage will take care of it. So?"

Amy thought for a moment. She'd not invested anything in him. While it wasn't like she had any other promising alternatives on the horizon, she'd made it this far in her life without him and could put that however enjoyable hour at Starbucks behind her.

"I barely know the guy," she told the others. "All this is too much. No, it's not worth it," she said with finality.

"So that's it, then," Evan said. "You want me to call him?"

Amy breathed a sigh of relief. That was easy, a crisis safely and permanently nipped in the bud. "No," she said to Evan. "I'll do it."

She caucused herself in the conference room, staring out the large window across 40th Street. She made the

return call and after a bit of back-and-forth that ended with them agreeing it was for the best and *good lucking* each other about their respective futures, that enjoyable hour at Starbucks was placed somewhere in recesses of each of their memories.

And at the Thursday gala for the Whitney, Peter Edgar appeared with Carolyn Evans, an enhanced blonde who in heels was just his height and after the requisite photos were taken and they sat through the speeches and the chicken dinners, they rode in a car to his place. He hooked up with her primarily if not exclusively to try to flush Amy out of his system and then accompanied her through his building's lobby and to the sidewalk. An Uber was waiting for her there, its back door being held open by Terry, one of the doormen. Peter gave her a slight kiss on the lips before helping her into the Escalade under Terry's watchful and discreet eye.

It was a little past midnight, and Peter watched the SUV head north through the very light traffic to wherever it was that she wished to go.

He was back in his apartment within five minutes and after congratulating himself about how well he'd handled the misdirection from the *Amy Reid situation*, he made himself comfortable in one of the guest rooms, leaving it to the next day's cleaning crew to take care of the disarray in his room and on his bed. They were used to the task, especially on Friday mornings.

In Friday's Page Six, there was a short item in the right-hand column. It had a small photo. The photo was a clear shot of Peter Edgar waving from a red carpet with a tall, elegant blonde on his arm. They were both smiling as they walked through the gaggle of paparazzi. The comments flooded in and virtually all of them agreed that this woman was far more appropriate for the Peter Edgar than Amy Reid could possibly have been.

JOSEPH P. GARLAND

No, the jury concluded, Amy Reid was not destined to be *the one*.

7.

IN THE DAYS AND WEEKS that followed, the glancing connection between Amy Reid and Peter Edgar faded drip-by-drip to become nothing but a pair of fond memories and a cautionary tale. Their lives returned to their normalcy. Amy walked to and from her office when the weather was good. She ate her salad and drank her iced tea at Bryant Park, with Sarah and one or two other workmates as often as not.

She went out on Thursday nights with friends and sometimes brought someone home with her and after a month or so she stopped imagining that it was Peter sharing her bed.

As for him, his image was again being splashed across the usual suspects from events in Manhattan or in the Hamptons. And for him, too, after a month or so he stopped imagining that the woman in his bed was Amy.

On a Thursday in mid-October, while Amy was bar hopping with Sarah, Peter was in a hotel ballroom on East 57th Street. Lenox Hill Hospital was having its annual gala. It was a formal event meant to raise some money and show appreciation for those who'd made substantial gifts to the hospital over the prior twelve months. And Peter was among them, having donated enough to the pediatric cancer wing to have his name placed on a donor-appreciation plaque that visitors saw when they stepped out of the elevator on the fifth floor of Lenox Hill's east wing.

As was usual for such high-end events, lesser doctors and nurses were invited on something of a rotating basis. This time, one of those nurses was Bridget Casey.

Joseph P. Garland

As the name suggests, she was half of Irish extraction and, not surprisingly for New York, her father was an NYPD detective and her mother an ER nurse in northern Manhattan.

Bridget had followed in her mother's footsteps. She was an RN at Lenox Hill Hospital on Manhattan's Upper East Side. She was 5' 5" and had a round face and blonde hair kept shoulder length—it reflected her mother's Swedish genes—and round, blue eyes. She lived in the Woodlawn section of the Bronx. It's at the northernmost part of the borough and has long been an Irish-American enclave that extends to bordering Yonkers.

She usually took the Number 4 subway to and from work in the same pediatric cancer department that coincidentally bore the plaque with Peter's name on it. She alternatively loved and hated her job, the hate being from the suffering she witnessed and her inability to do much about it.

Bridget was drafted into going to this Lenox Hill fundraiser to help put a face on the department's nurses. It had been a long day and she had wanted to get home but she had committed and she'd at least get a good meal and some very good wine for her efforts.

She wore one of the gowns that were shared by the similarly-sized nurses. It was a shimmering blue that didn't quite fit Bridget's curves, but it was close enough to make it acceptable even in the elite couture company in which she'd be mingling and it matched wonderfully with her eyes and the chignon into which a fellow nurse had put her hair during a meal break. She wore her own pair of two-inch heels that she pulled out whenever she had to go to one of these things or a wedding and carried a clutch she'd borrowed from her mother for the occasion.

REDEMPTION

She took the 103 bus down Lexington, her classy outfit generating her share of notice from the other passengers, and walked the block and a half to the hotel.

The cavernous ballroom on the second floor was beyond tasteful in its decorations. A steady stream of servers in black trousers and white shirts carrying trays with drinks or *hors d'oeuvres* navigated through the gaps between clusters of guests in formal attire and, on the women at least, sparkling jewels. It all reflected the subtle wealth and accomplishment that was and had always been a hallmark of high society in New York.

It was plain that Bridget was not of that society in her ill-fitted gown and lack of diamonds except for the pair of studs in her ears, also borrowed from her mom. Still, at this event she did belong even if she did not fit in. As she stood off the periphery more than a few guests who saw the *RN* on her badge smiled and nodded at her as they passed, some even stopping to express their appreciation for her work.

One who noticed the department in which she worked stepped close to her and reached for her hand. She was a pretty woman in her late 40s and her husband had slipped away from her when she'd made this little detour. Gripping and shaking Bridget's hands, she simply thanked the nurse for the blessed work she did. "My father would thank you himself were he still with us," she added and then with a tap on the nurse's hand she stepped away to rejoin her husband. Bridget did not get her name and did not see her again at the event.

That moment alone was enough to make her glad she had come.

She stepped deeper into the percolating and echoing buzz of the crowd and took a glass of white wine from a passing server with a *thanks*. She flowed through the little packets of guests and donors and doctors trying to make

herself at least look like she belonged among them. Which is when she saw him.

Peter Edgar. *She* knew who he was. He was alone at least for the moment. It wouldn't hurt to hurry over and get a selfie with the famous bachelor, which is all she planned to do. It'd look nice on her Facebook page. She and her gang would enjoy laughing about it.

Peter Edgar slumming with the staff!

In the spirit of doing it as a lark, she approached him, said hello in a mockingly seductive voice, and asked if she could take a picture with him. He noticed her name tag with its distinctive *RN* and her department.

Peter was used to this sort of request. It happened all the time. He flagged down an older gentleman in a tux who snapped the picture of the pair of them on Bridget's phone.

She started to walk away.

"I'm Peter, by the way."

She turned her head to look over her shoulder. "Yes. I know. I've seen your plaque."

She started to walk away a second time, her phone held lightly in her hand.

"And you're Bridget?" He said it halfway between a question and a statement of fact.

"Yes. Bridget Casey. I'm a nurse in the pediatric oncology department."

Before anything more could be said by either of them, someone came up to him and said there was someone he should meet. Bridget thanked him for the photo and turned from him and was gone. A minute later, he was joined by his date, herself a cardiologist at the hospital who'd been matched with him by a hospital administrator.

"Who was that?" she asked.

"Bridget somebody. An Irish name. She's a nurse."

"Not in my department," the doctor said.

REDEMPTION

And that exchange ended the slight connection the nurse and Peter had as they were called into dinner, where Peter and his date were at Table 2 with board members and department heads.

Bridget was at Table 12, mixed in among an oncologist and her attorney wife and a number of the lesser donors. She actually enjoyed it, helped by the free flow of wine for which she'd pay the next morning when she began her twelve-hour shift at 7