

## Chapter 3

### Desperately Seeking a Rebound

Escape. That was the only thing that Evan could think of. What was the quickest way out of the Bowery Bar? He saw an opening and navigated a focused path to the door, blurring out of his mind the obnoxious jokes and comments trailing from various areas near Tina. He shuffled past the glam squad and various hotties piling in, and didn't say goodbye to the doorman or bouncers as he usually did, hoping that if he looked down and moved quickly enough, they wouldn't notice his emergency evacuation.

He jumped into the nearest taxi and said "Just drive!" – as if he were in the midst of some dramatic, high-speed getaway. As he sailed away from the disaster area, with the soft, summer night breeze blowing against his face through the open window, he slowly began deliberating about his options. "I should just quit while I'm ahead," he thought.

Ignoring his own advice, he pulled out his cell phone and a printed list of phone numbers.

Back in autopilot mode, he called a cell phone number off the list.

"Can I speak to Sayvvyer, please?"

"Who the fuck is calling here after one in the morning?"

"I'm returning a wallet that she lost."

"You have the wrong number."

He tried the next number on the list.

"Can I speak to Sayvvyer, please?"

"You're looking for the savior? At 1:15 a.m.?"

"No. Her name's Sayvvyer."

"There is no savior here. Especially not at 1:15 a.m."

Evan shook his head in frustration and wondered for a moment whether the comely brunette had given her real name to Evan. "It had to be her real name...She knew way too many jokes off the top of her head that involved her name," he recalled. "And she told me how – when she was young – she thought her hippy parents were cruel for giving her such a weird name and how later she thought the name made her hip and distinctive...And two of her friends called her 'Sayvvyer' that night...So it's definitely her name..." Evan crossed out the two numbers he had just dialed and shook his head in frustration. "But why couldn't she have had a more normal name?" he thought.

In Evan's world, Sayvvyer was an "8.5 hottie," which would be more than enough of a consolation prize at this particularly low-spirited moment. Unfortunately, there were four digits separating Evan from his savior. He thought about how cruel and absurd it was that something as trivial as the knowledge of four particular numbers could keep him from a potentially delightful encounter with a woman who could salvage his miserable night.

He had met her six weeks ago at Au Bar. The posh nightclub on East Fifty-eighth Street drew “Euro-trash,” cigar-smoking bankers, and attractive women vying for trophy-wife status. After his fifth drink, Evan had shared all of his woes with Sayvvyer at the bar. “Do you have any idea how much talent it takes to lose a job and a girlfriend in just two days, and all via email?” he began. “It’s really pretty difficult, and I’m thinking of starting an evening workshop for people who aren’t as talented as I am in that regard.”

Evan’s charm and sympathetic misfortunes grew on Sayvvyer during their thirty-minute chat, and she tried her best to lift his spirits. “I think it’s great that that asshole boss fired you,” she said. “You needed to get out of there. You’re way too good for a place like that.”

“I heard they’re about to go bankrupt soon anyway.”

“You had no business working there in the first place.”

“Why do you say that?”

“You’re one of those guys who’s too smart to be working for someone else.”

“Do I really seem that geeky?”

“You’re a total geek.”

“Oh great.”

“But you’re a hip and handsome geek. I mean, how many computer programmers out there look like you and write novels and screenplays on the side?”

Evan felt truly lifted for a moment. He was starved for this kind of validation. After some good laughs and playful conversation, the two ended up dancing, and eventually grinding, on the dance floor, where they made out briefly among a room full of swaying, tightly pressed bodies.

But their momentum was interrupted when Sayvvyer’s friends came up to her and insisted that she come with them to an exclusive party in the VIP section of another club. She couldn’t refuse the gorgeous group or convince them to let Evan tag along. But she did stall them long enough to explain her departure to Evan and give him her phone number.

“Why was I such a bonehead?” he thought, as he recalled their concluding banter, and how he had foolishly tried to show off his memory and knowledge of psychology.

“Now I’m giving you my number only if you absolutely promise to use it,” she said. “I’m sick of guys not calling when they say they’ll call...”

“There are actually guys out there who promise they’ll call you and then don’t?”

“Yeah. And some think that email is just as good. But it’s a very bad sign...I mean, if the guy doesn’t call you before you’ve slept with him, he sure as hell won’t call after.”

“Well, I hereby unconditionally and absolutely promise to call you if you give me your phone number. And I do this on behalf of every negligent male, in every mammalian species,” Evan said, in the geekiest tongue-in-cheek he could muster.

“So you’re now representing every non-calling male in every species?”

“Even the he-goats that didn’t call the she-goats. And the dogs that didn’t dial the digits of bitches...”

“So if you break this promise, I can truly write off all males, and just become a lesbian?”

“Yes. But if I keep my promise to call, then you have to forgive all of these males, and start giving them all the benefit of the doubt – from the dogs to the dudes.”

“And why is that?”

“Because – contrary to all appearances – I’m as bad as they get, and if I call when I say I will, then there really is hope for all the other males out there.”

“Well that’s very reassuring to hear,” she replied. “So are you going to get something to write down my number with?” she asked, as her friends waited impatiently for the two to end their encounter.

Evan drew nearer to her and whispered into her ear, “Just tell it to me...A dog like me doesn’t need to write it down...”

“Why not?” she asked, resting her hand on Evan’s lower back.

“I can remember it. Trust me,” he replied, letting his hands find their way to her firm and round behind.

“Why are you so sure?” she said, placing her lips just above his neck and below his ear.

“Because I can. Most people can... You know, phone numbers have seven digits in them because memory experiments showed that this was the maximum number of digits that most people can retain.”

“You are a geek, aren’t you? A yummy-looking geek,” she said flirtatiously, as she slid her waist between his legs a little.

“A geek who will definitely call,” he replied, emboldened and aroused by the physical contact.

At this point, Evan felt so good about his odds with Sayvyer that he suddenly wanted to avoid taking any chances with his memory – particularly because he had imbibed one too many vodka cranberries and had already crammed his head with four other names and numbers from earlier that night.

“Well, geeks run the world...And that’s sexy,” she replied, grabbing Evan’s butt and grinding into him until she could feel something harden a little more. And with that statement, she made it impossible for Evan to backtrack on his offer to memorize her phone number, because resorting to the safer pen and paper approach after that statement would defrock Evan of his geeky godliness. He also feared that Sayvyer’s increasingly impatient friends might drag her off while he foraged about for a paper and pen.

Fortunately for Evan, when Sayvyer whispered her 212-phone number to him, while continuing to arouse him on the dance floor, he did manage to notice that there was a sixty-nine in the last four digits – a mnemonic fact for which he was quite grateful.

“See that? There’s a sixty-nine in your number, so there’s no way I can forget it now!” he pointed out.

“True. But that number won’t mean anything to us if you can’t remember the rest,” she replied suggestively.

“Don’t worry. I’m more likely to forget my name,” he said, just as Sayvvyer was pulled away by her friends. He caught one last wink from her as she moved towards the exit with her gang and then disappeared behind a large crowd.

The next morning, as his Saturday afternoon hangover subsided, he realized that he could perfectly recall only two of the four numbers he had taken before meeting Sayvvyer, and – worst of all – he could recall only that the first two digits of Sayvvyer’s phone number were ninety-four and that there was a sixty-nine somewhere among the last four digits. No matter how many times he replayed his dialogue with Sayvvyer, Evan couldn’t remember what the third digit was, or even where among the last four digits the number sixty-nine appeared.

He thought about his monumental misstep from the previous night while shaving, which was in itself a mistake because each time he thought about his error, a spontaneous, self-flagellating headshake occurred that produced a minor shaving cut. But a little later, as he popped two frozen waffles into a toaster and heated up some coffee, it dawned on him that his sexy geekiness could still save the day.

Given the facts of which he was sure – a seven-digit number beginning with ninety-four and containing sixty-nine among the last four digits – Evan calculated that there were exactly three thousand permutations of possible phone numbers for Sayvvyer. He quickly wrote a computer program that generated for him a print out of all three thousand permutations.

He figured that if he tried one phone number permutation per day it would take him a maximum of roughly eight years to get the correct number. He then thought about what it would take to call Sayvvyer within the optimal wait period, as most women he knew defined it (i.e., no more than two days later). To conduct some ballpark research, Evan timed a random call and realized that it took fifteen seconds to dial one phone number and let it ring at least three times. Assuming a conversation that lasted only long enough to establish that the number dialed was incorrect, Evan concluded that it would take approximately thirty seconds per phone number. He calculated that if he worked assiduously for twelve and a half hours per day, which still gave him some rest time between calls, he could cover one thousand five hundred numbers per day. At that rate, working for two days, he could call her in no more than two days after she gave him her number.

Satisfied that it was actually feasible to reach her within the optimal two-day period, he set about trying to dial every permutation on his print out, crossing out wrong numbers as he worked his way down the list. He applied himself to the task rather diligently for about five hours, and eliminated six hundred incorrect numbers. At that point, however, his fingers were tired, his ear was sore, his neck was stiff, and he was wondering whether the tedium and physical fatigue of nonstop cold calling were really worth the brownie points of calling within two days.

He took a dinner break – consisting of leftover Chinese food – and settled on a compromise solution that struck him as far more reasonable. There were now two thousand four hundred permutations left, and he would try forty per day on average, so that it would take him no more than about two months

to dial the correct number for Sayvyer. This meant that he would have to spend only about twenty minutes per day dialing numbers, and if bad luck brought him to Sayvyer's number only in month two (rather than, say, in a week or two), then he would just need to invent a good excuse for waiting so long to call her.

"If only Sayvyer could know how committed I've been to meeting my obligations to the female gender," Evan thought to himself, as he sat in the back of the taxi, that last Thursday night of August 2000, where he reflected for a moment on how he had voluntarily exceeded his quota of forty phone number permutations for that day. But then he admitted to himself that – after what had just happened to him at the Bowery Bar – he was prepared to do almost anything to save the night, or at least soften its sting.

But Evan needed a quick fix now, and dialing more random phone numbers from a list of seven hundred remaining possibilities in the hope of reaching a woman he had met about six weeks ago at Au Bar was hardly going to help. A better solution suddenly dawned on him. He would call up Alexandra, who had returned from Australia four weeks ago.

Evan leaned forward and finally gave his getaway cab driver a more specific destination: "Can you head to the Upper East Side?" The Pakistani cabbie shook his head a little, slightly annoyed, as he turned the next corner to drive in the opposite direction.

Evan had seen Alexandra each day of her first week back in New York, and had tried in vain to get back together with her. But she had made it clear that they were through. On her tenth day back, when Evan showed up with a bouquet and dinner from her favorite Thai takeout, she gave him what she sarcastically dubbed "your last charity fuck." A few days later, Evan decided to check in with her on another whim, at around midnight, just to see if she still hadn't met another guy and might therefore be ready and willing to indulge one more spur-of-the-moment tryst, if not a fuller restoration of their relationship. She invited him up.

As they removed their last articles of clothing, she remarked playfully, "This really is your last charity fuck, Evan."

"Alex, as long as I can keep coming back for one last charity fuck like this, I may eventually come to terms with the idea that we're breaking up."

She laughed and pulled him towards her.

They impatiently attacked each other with sexual desire, and made their way towards her bed.

But when Evan called her the next day, she reminded him in a more serious tone that it really was over between them.

Three weeks later (but this time at around 1:30 a.m.), Evan decided to resort to the same desperate measures, even though Alexandra wasn't the kind of woman who stayed single for more than a few weeks.

From the back seat of the cab, he called Alexandra on his cell phone. As her phone rang, Evan rehearsed in his head a slew of opening lines and excuses for why he was now calling her, at 1:30 a.m., on a Thursday night.

After eight rings, she finally answered.

“Hello?” She had been sleeping.

“Hey Alex.”

“Who is this?”

“It’s Evan.”

“Evan?”

“Yeah, it’s Evan. Remember me?”

“What’s going on?”

“I...uh...What’s up with you?”

“You called me.”

“I know...I thought maybe...”

“Maybe what?”

“Maybe we could, uh. You know, maybe, uh...”

“Evan, are you stoned?”

“No, I...Uh...”

“Have you lost some brain cells?”

“No, I...I was just riding in the back of this cab, thinking about how great that last charity fuck was, and I thought I’d call you to see if you’re feeling charitable.”

“You’re waking me up in the middle of the night for a charity fuck?”

“Basically.”

“How about a charity abstention?”

“I’ve already had three weeks of those.”

“Well this abstention really would be charitable, if you know what I mean...”

“What do you mean?”

“Evan, you’re calling me at...1:30 a.m.”

“I figured you’d be up...”

“I am up...Now that you called...And thanks to you, Tito’s up now too.”

“Who’s Tito?”

“My Samoan boyfriend...”

“Samoan boyfriend?”

“Yeah, you know those guys from the Pacific Islands who are about six-five and three hundred pounds?”

“Is he really Samoan?”

Evan heard a stentorian voice in the background say “Gimme that phone.”

“Listen fuck-face,” the Samoan began. “If you ever call this number again, day or night, I’m gonna find out from Alex where you live, and if you’ve moved, I’m gonna have my cousin at the FBI track you down. And then I’m gonna find you, and then I’m gonna personally pound your face into a rare burger patty. And you know what I’m gonna do then? I’m gonna feed your face to your asshole. Nice and slow. You got that? Now say your last words to Alex.”

Evan heard the phone being passed back to Alexandra.

“Evan...Sorry about that...He’s actually really nice once you get to know him...But I think I should go now.”

“Yeah...It’s been nice knowing you.”

“Good night, Evan.”

His cab was at East Fifty-sixth Street and Third Avenue when Evan realized that he was headed in the direction of – rather than away from – the scene of his latest disaster. He leaned forward to redirect the cab driver.

“Actually, can you head back downtown again?”

“Where do you want me to go? Can’t you make up your mind?” The cabbie’s heavy Pakistani accent somehow magnified the exasperation in his voice, and he had clearly forgotten that he was profiting from Evan’s indecisiveness.

Evan concluded, incorrectly, that he had hit the nadir of his evening and could now go back to his studio apartment in Gramercy and privately lick his wounds.

“Let’s go to Twentieth and Park,” he instructed.

The cab driver shook his head impatiently as he made a left at Fifty-seventh Street.

But Evan suddenly remembered two buddies who were often awake late and possibly still looking for a good time at 1:40 a.m. on a Thursday night. On a whim, he called each friend. The first call went to voicemail. “At this hour, he’s probably getting laid or dancing in some club that can’t get cell phone reception,” Evan figured. But the second friend he called answered his cell phone.

“Dude, let’s meet up,” Evan urged. “It’s beautiful out, and there are babes everywhere.”

“Tell me about it. Where are you?”

“My cab just hit Fifty-seventh and Park.”

“Funny, I just came from that area.”

“So where are you now?”

“On Forty-third and Eleventh, about ten feet from my futon and TV.”

And with those words, Evan knew that getting him to come out was a lost cause. Evan had once coined the term “The Law of Subjective Progress” to describe the psychological aversion that prevents any New Yorker from retracing a path just taken. He recognized that this psychological allergy afflicted humans everywhere, but because New York was so compact and relatively easy to navigate, it always

struck him as doubly irrational when – for example – someone who had just crossed from Midtown East to Midtown West would rather go to a slightly farther destination in a different direction than return to Midtown East. Evan’s psychological theory posited that humans subconsciously associate their geographical location with their overall life progress, so he knew that it would be impossible to convince his friend to come back to the area he had just left. The Law of Subjective Progress was too powerful – especially after 1:40 a.m. and with a New Yorker over the age of thirty who was steps away from his futon.

So Evan wished his friend a good night, leaned back in his cab seat, and finally resigned himself to calling it a night.

But about ten minutes later, when Evan’s taxi was waiting at a stop light at the intersection of Thirtieth and Park, a boisterous bevy of babes playfully waved at him. The scantily clad college students seductively beckoned him to follow.

Despite the lingering suspicion that he was on too serious a losing streak for this omen to be a good one, Evan decided to get out and follow them.

“Actually, I don’t need Twentieth and Park. This is fine,” he said to the cabbie, who was just as happy finally to rid himself of the most fickle passenger he had had in the last year.

Evan paid his fare, got out, and closed the cab door, at which point he heard one of the four young women exclaim, “Oh my God, he’s actually coming over!” As he looked over at the group, he saw them giggling immaturely and scurrying ahead of him a little faster, as if to escape the very adventure they had provoked.

“Hey wait a sec!” Evan hurried up after them, but this only made them move away faster. Evan followed briskly in their direction, alternating between a fast walk and a run, not sure if they would be amused or frightened when he finally reached them.

At Twenty-eighth and Park, he caught up to them, and tried to catch his breath and introduce himself, but they were all giggling too hard, as they exchanged accusations.

“You called him over here!” said a tall redhead in a tight mini-skirt and a black silk top that barely managed to cover her bouncy breasts; she seemed to be the leader of the pack.

“You did!” protested a shorter brunette in a similar outfit.

“No I didn’t! Liar!”

“You both did,” Evan began. “But don’t worry,” he said between breaths, “I don’t bite...I just come when I’m called.”

“Can you roll over and play dead?” the redhead asked, as her sophomoric gang broke into laughs.

“Only if I’ve got someone to roll with,” Evan replied. It was the best answer that came to mind, but he knew it wasn’t great.

“You’re way too old for us to roll with you!” the shorter brunette quipped.

“How old do I look?” Evan replied, suddenly more concerned about the true answer than what it would ultimately mean for this particular encounter.

“At least twenty-eight,” opined the redhead.

“Why twenty-eight?”

“I don’t know. You can just tell...”

“Well, I’m twenty-nine.”

“That’s even worse.”

“Why? How old are you?”

“We’re all nineteen.”

“Oh.” Evan could sense that he was about to start desperately grasping for straws. “Well don’t you want to know what it’s like to be a decade older?” he asked.

“Not really,” replied the redhead.

Because Evan’s question assumed that these women were profounder than they actually were – at least at the age of nineteen – it only succeeded in highlighting just how much older he was. Evan, of course, was not in any state to appreciate this paradox.

“But aren’t you curious about my wise perspective on life?”

“We’ve got the rest of our lives to learn what it’s like to have a wise old perspective,” replied the redhead, on behalf of her clan. The others all laughed in agreement, as she hailed a taxi.

Evan shook his head in frustration as the college girls all loudly piled into the back of the cab and drove off.