

BEFORE ADRIAN GRENIER GOT FAMOUS

Adrian Grenier was walking towards us.

He was not yet famous. He'd been featured in Seventeen magazine's hottest actors to watch list, which was where we first saw him months before. We were seventeen ourselves, lazily dragging our overripe bodies through our high school library. Evie had swiped the issue on a whim—after all, Seventeen was really for 12-year olds, we'd long ago decided, while Cosmo was for the 16 and up crowd—and we pored through its pages together until she saw him. Him, she'd said, and pointed. Who is he? She was already shimmering with wanderlust.

Inside the concourse of our small city airport Adrian looked like the patron saint of all that is dirty. Of rough sex and a leftover roach on the nightstand; of everything our parent's warned us about but which we were inevitably taken with. We could not turn away from Adrian, as if he was the sun and us just some nubby flowers that might wither if he left.

That's him, I told her.

No it's not, she said. She was in shock.

He had literally appeared from a haze of smoke. You could smoke in airports back then, and we had each lit a Camel in nervous anticipation. We bought our cigarettes cheap from a Greek market by school. Cigarettes were two and some change back then. That was before Adrian Grenier got famous.

We did things like meet Adrian Grenier because we were bored, because our bodies had made their impressions onto the world early and at night we felt the pain of being trapped, like bronze statuettes with vivid dreams of life. Only Evie and I were living dual lives already: one in the flesh, and one on the phone, using three-way dialing.

We called the DiMaggio-lookalike school baseball coach some late nights, dipping our voice low into sultry territory.

Do you know who this is, one of us would whimper.

No, I do not, the coach replied.

C'mon, you mean you don't remember our time together?

I was secretly infatuated with the coach, and calling him had been all my idea. I passed him each morning in the hallway and always pointedly glanced his way, imagining I really was Marilyn Monroe. Neither of us said it, but neither Evie nor I were beyond doing something extreme, like blowing a faculty member in his car after school. Female teachers eyed us, as if they knew what we could do. Every Wednesday, Evie and I and a few other girls met with the guidance counselor for our "troubled teens" workshop.

Are you going to keep calling me like this? the coach asked. Because I can tell you're young by the way you don't know what you're doing. You're young and bored. And I'm old. And old people sleep on Friday night because there's nothing better to do.

Then he hung up.

We'd called people as early as we could remember. We called boys from our classes, we pretended to be pretty girls we loathed and were jealous of.

Hi Thomas, it's me, Stephanie.

Uh, hey, Steph.

I love your cock, we'd whisper.

What?!

Homework? we pretended to repeat.

Calling people was thrilling. Took us outside of our bodies. This was before the Internet had fully inundated peoples' lives, and the landline seemed to us the oldest form of entertainment, like ringing and running or egging cars, and we felt a pathological compulsion to call even random numbers, to hold conversations with strange men, to let them believe someone, out there, was thinking about them in the middle of the night.

We rarely slept. I'd lie on the carpet of my bedroom, the lights off, a little faint radio in the background, the telephone cord wrapping and unwrapping from my hand, my feet massaging into the dirty carpet for hours as we took turns channeling people we weren't. Evie lived in the attic space of her parent's three-story house, unbothered by the family life that went on below her. Up there, she was lawless, the troublemaker out of her three other sisters who were being groomed to take up careers as engineers or lawyers.

We called back the baseball coach; we called men we met from the college radio station we DJed at. We breathed heavily. We said things like: My panties are so wet. We said things like: What do you think about when you come? Talking about sex made our skin feel on fire, like we were not gawky teenagers, but illustrious vixens.

We called crushes. We changed our voices. We were experts, actresses, criminals.

Josh, hello? Yeah, I'm here. It's me Margaret. You don't know me, but I know you. I watch you. I like what I see, and I touch myself.

The boys we called exhaled longingly into their receivers. We pictured their rooms, the blue covers they were fondling themselves under, and how clueless they were. How absolutely clueless.

Adrian Grenier's breakout role came in the low-budget but critically acclaimed film, "The Adventures of Sebastian Cole," in 1998. That was the year of the Seventeen magazine article. Next up was Woody Allen's "Celebrity," and a teen rom-com titled, "Drive Me Crazy."

Let's call him, Evie said one night.

We dialed 411.

City and state please?

Brooklyn, New York.

That was where he lived, we knew, the article told us.

Back then it was easy to be a stalker. It was easy when you're seventeen and desperate and infatuated with escape.

Just one moment—the operator said.

Then, a number. We called it.

Adrian? said Evie.

Who is this?

We're journalists, I said. From North Carolina.

Then Evie said: We want to interview about your new movie.

He informed us that he was coming to North Carolina in two weeks.

The School of the Arts, he said. You know where that is?

No, but we could find out.

Yeah, I stammered.

You could pick me up from the airport and we can do the interview there, he suggested.

He was visiting a friend who attended the School of the Arts, in Winston-Salem, a town over.

I just gotta get the flight into, he said. Can I call you back tomorrow?

We gave him my number. Evie's father was a protective, intimidating Nigerian man. He interrogated anyone who beckoned for his daughter.

I lived with my drunk father in a small, second-story apartment. He didn't care what I did, as long as I never got arrested.

Dad, I said, one night. Someone really important is going to call me. I need you to answer, and sound casual.

Not like your dad? he said.

Not like my dad.

Got it, he said.

By seventh grade, Evie and I were inseparable. We were lonely, a little stir-crazy, and just plain crazy. We wanted to be famous. We dreamed of writing for magazines. We hounded our mothers' Elles and Vogues and read the sex articles from Cosmopolitan. We knew about each form of birth control, symptoms of every venereal disease. We knew what men liked and didn't like. We could name the head designers behind Chloe, Chanel, and Gucci. We smoked cigarettes. We knew that if men ejaculated inside of us, we could get pregnant. We dreamed of exotic places. We wrote poems. We fantasized that someday we'd date brothers who looked alike. We'd live in houses next door to each other. We'd start a magazine, or a production company, or we'd make a movie about us. When we're famous, we repeated over and over until it was mantra, everyone will want to make a movie about us.

The night Adrian called my house, I was out.

My father answered and had taken a message.

Did anyone call? I asked breathlessly when I got home.

Just that guy, said my father, searching the coffee table for where he'd written the name. Here it is, he said. Adrian.

Adrian Grenier called my house, I thought, which was probably the first moment I felt really alive, where I wanted to rush into the street and strip from my clothes. A celebrity had called for *me*. He'd said my name—*Is Sarah there?*

I tried to sound not like your dad, my dad said. Like a roommate, I guess.

I laughed and kissed his cheek.

He said he'd call back, my father called.

I was already in my room, with the door closed, dialing Evie.

He called, I told her. He really did call.

In eighth grade, Evie and I were in the same art class.

We called our assistant art teacher, Mr. Weir. He was in training and his tenure in our classroom was part of an internship that would eventually earn him a PhD. A boy in class called him Bob Weir, after the Grateful Dead guitarist, and this helped cement the lore that already surrounded him.

Mr. Weir was ugly-hot. He wore wide wale corduroy in burnished brown shades and heavyweight wool sweaters. He had a pair of old-timey glasses, a bad complexion, and was very tall and accordingly lanky. He was just awkward enough to be considered fascinating in our minds, and we worshipped him from afar: his overgrown bangs that he constantly moved out of the path of his vision, lace-up Oxfords which were scuffed and in dire need of heel replacement, and his long bony fingers and symbolic name that almost certainly indicated that he was a musician, we told ourselves. We loved him.

That night at a sleepover at our friend Valerie's, in between smoking Kent cigarettes and deliberately slashing our panty hose to look more tortured, we phoned Mr. Weir in the middle of the night. In class he frequently spoke of a woman named Virginia, his girlfriend. Evie was particularly fascinated by her and saw Virginia as the woman who had usurped her place in Mr. Weir's life. As young girls who desperately wanted to

be grown women with lives of freedom, the information on Virginia was especially troubling, and Evie was disheartened more than the rest of us.

Evie had a secret love affair with the music of Rod Stewart. In the mid-90's, this was understandable, and we were young enough to still be enamored with our parents' penchants for the soft, schmaltzy rock Stewart was prone to at the time. She favored the song "Leave Virginia Alone" which became her mantra when dealing with Mr. Weir. While phoning him, Evie queued the song on Valerie's CD player, and when a sleepy voice answered the phone we scrambled to press play, and the chorus blared:

So leave Virginia alone

Leave Virginia alone

She's not like you

And me

She's not like you

And me

You should've seen her

Back in the city

Poetry and jewels

Broke all the rules

She was as high as

A Georgia palm tree

The phone rang an hour later.

I was smoking a cigarette out of my window when I answered.

Hello?

I tried to sound casual. Like I was older, disaffected.

Hey, Sarah? It's me Adrian. Just calling you back about the interview.

Right, I said. The interview.

Well, I have the flight information here. American Airlines. You have a pen ready?

Of course I did. I wrote everything down on the back of an envelope. The flight number. I had never even been on a plane. I had never seen a celebrity face to face. I had let stupid boys touch me with their dirty, unpolished hands. I hadn't saved myself for Adrian, for anything better, for curly tendrils and tight, worn jeans. Evie and I made do with country boys, for tattered secondhand clothes we exchanged back and forth, imagining they were silk dresses, designer jeans, not skimpy, polyester things.

Hanging up with Adrian I told him, Okay, we'll be there. Three o'clock. See you then.

Then I lay back on my bed and touched my nipples, Adrian's voice still clear as a favorite song playing on loop in my head. I imagined the touch was his, that his palms were not my smooth-small ones, but cracked and big, and that he would do anything he wanted with them.

We'd called Jon Brennan from the Real World one summer. He was the virginal country singer from the Real World Los Angeles. His number was listed and easily available from 411.

Hey! we said on the phone, drunk and upstairs in Evie's basement. Remember us from that show you played?

Yeehaw! we squealed. We were always squealing.

I dunno, he said. I think I remember you. You those girls from up Memphis?

Sure are! we said in unison.

Then Evie said: You still a virgin?

Adrian Grenier was sitting in the back of my Toyota Corolla.

If my family had been rich, I might've had a white drop-top BMW. Adrian's hair would be flying, and so would mine. Evie would smirk in the passenger seat, turn the radio higher, and Adrian would lean up to us and say, I don't care where I go with you girls. Just drive.

And I would.

He'd arrived with a satchel slung around his torso. Books peeked out. Shuffled papers. A leather-bound journal of his original poetry, or so I imagined.

He didn't say anything about how young we looked.

He didn't ask for credentials.

He just got in the car, and I drove.

What do you girls do around here? he asked.

We looked at each other.

You know, said Evie. Drinking.

He nodded. Right on.

What do you do? I asked.

Everything I said was tinged with country and seemed unrefined. I was so nervous that I couldn't be myself, whoever that was.

I play music, he said. He pulled our flyers for his band's show. His band was called Body Rock.

Here, he said. I'll give you some extras. You can keep 'em.

Those flyers were the only evidence I had of our day with Adrian Grenier. We didn't bring a camera. There was no tape recorder. Only Evie's pager, which she used to receive an imaginary page from our editor. In a lobby at the School of the Arts, Evie used a payphone and pretended to dial our fake editor while I stood dumbly beside Adrian.

Hello? said Evie. Yeah, I think the story's gonna be good...

Then the loud wail of the dial tone emanated from the payphone.

Evie hung up while Adrian looked at us, as if he had just an inkling that we were not who we said we were.

Those flyers stayed in my car until my father cleaned it out and tossed everything.

Would anyone ever believe that I had hung out with Adrian Grenier? I wondered, some nights, when the memory of it all was just beginning to fade.

No way, naysayers would tell me.

Oh, yes, I'd retort. It was before he got famous and everything.

We were to watch Adrian's friend's play at the School of the Arts. We had hours to kill before show time. This was the time we were supposed to interview Adrian, but we were unfamiliar with Winston-Salem, we had no money, and we weren't really reporters. We couldn't drink, so restaurants were out of the question.

We found a grassy knoll in the center of campus and lay there in the grass, staring at Adrian, feeling small and embarrassed. Afternoon winded, and the sky turned the color of Easter eggs. We smoked cigarettes and he showed us a Gucci condom holder he'd received from a big L.A. bash.

Evie and I both wanted to touch it. *That was the feel of Gucci.* We passed the square thing between us, eyeing each other. Gucci, we both thought. Motherfucking, Gucci.

During the play, Adrian sat between us. I tore the program into little pieces and then poured them onto Adrian's knee. I don't know why I did this. I couldn't watch the play. I was sitting next to Adrian Grenier. Even Evie was anxious. I looked at her in the darkness, her shoulders tense, her eyes wide with a look of near-terror.

Adrian just looked at me, then at the pile of scrap, and then at me. Maybe he smirked before blowing them onto the floor. A snow globe of Adrian Grenier.

Intermission.

Evie and I filed outside into the night air and lit cigarettes.

I can't believe it, she said.

I know, I replied.

That was all we could say.

Did you see me tear up that paper? I said.

Evie laughed. You need to calm down.

I can't, I said.

Me neither.

We could see into the lobby of the theatre. We watched Adrian running back and forth—searching desperately for someone, something, his friend?

Back inside, Adrian rushed up to us.

There you are! he called.

What's up? I asked.

I thought you ran off with my stuff, he said, sighing with relief.

Evie and I looked at each other with intense regret.

We could've made off with all of his shit, we told people for years after the event.

Adrian Grenier was famous at this point. He was starring in *Entourage* on HBO. He dated models. Paparazzi took his photograph. His number was now unlisted with 411.

Evie and I were now in college. We took creative writing classes and in two workshops we had to be physically separated for disrupting the class. I wrote a prized

story about an obese janitor who was in love with one of his students. Evie wrote a piece about a girl from Brooklyn Heights who stalked her next door neighbor. Our teacher called our stories deranged, and that was when I finally realized that he was right. Evie and I were deranged people, and that made me sad.

We still made prank calls, after all, but were older, and turned our sights to other minor celebrities we admired. We phoned Paul Westerberg from the Replacements until he blocked our number. We called singers in other bands we loved. We went to shows and met bassists and drummers and followed them to dark bars. Once, on a night drive, Evie pulled the car over, both of us sobbing. The Dire Straits tune “Romeo and Juliet” was playing, and it reminded us of how alone we were, how we felt as though we were destined to die clinging to each other.

Maybe we should just date each other, Evie said one night. I never knew if she was joking or not.

We kissed men in local bands that played bluesy bar rock in downtrodden bars across town. They were all approaching forty, unmarried, and depressed that their rock-n-roll careers never happened. One was a dead ringer for Bruce Springsteen, who made us macaroni-and-cheese and who we both slept with on a bare mattress on the floor of his bedroom.

Sometimes I thought Evie would vanish if we stopped the ride we’d been on for so long. Soliciting and harassing men had become her sole identity. At her waitressing job near campus she befriended a handsome and wealthy Vietnam vet who owned a construction business. She called me one night to say that she’d slept with him and that

afterwards he was distant, telling Evie that he had a daughter her age. He wanted her to leave, and he fished seventy dollars from his pocket and gave it to her.

Did he think I was a prostitute? she asked me.

She called and called the vet until he said he never wanted to see her again. Once she saw him walking down the street, but when he glimpsed her, he actually started running.

That summer, Evie became engaged to a tow-truck driver with an IQ of about 64. He was a prime target for Evie's machinations. He'd been left an inheritance from his mother's death and gave Evie her antique wedding ring. I think Evie had been his one and only love interest, and she would call me and tell me how he'd taken her shopping and out to fancy dinners.

When she called him, she wanted me on the line with them. He was pathetic, and she was taking advantage of him for money. When he wanted to break the news to Evie's father, she broke their senseless engagement but kept the ring.

One night we called Adrian's old phone number, hoping one of his former roommates would give us updated contact information. We ended up on the line with a guy named Buzz for hours. I eventually hung up, but Evie and Buzz spoke until seven that morning, when Buzz booked a flight to Greensboro to meet Evie. He stayed for a week at her apartment where they fucked and fought the entire time. Eventually he took an early flight back to New York, calling Evie crazy.

Was she crazy? It's easy to look back now and say yes, but in despite of all, I loved her. We were both disturbed, and as I began to tire of the routine we'd carved, I distanced myself from Evie. I knew she could've continued forever.

By college's end, our friendship was over, had been declining ever since those fiction workshops where our deranged stories got called deranged and I got scared but Evie grew bolder. Various things had happened between us to end our relationship, one of which was that Evie had tried to scam my insurance company after I'd totaled my car stoned on pot.

It was her biggest prank to date.

I received the call one evening, totally stunned. The insurance man said Evie had filed damages but hadn't sent in paperwork backing her claims.

What are those claims? I asked.

She'd told the man that the wreck caused her to become partially blind, that she had to drop out of school, and work; that Evie had become an invalid.

Is any of this true? the man wondered.

I can't believe it, I stuttered. None of it. None of it's true.

Before Adrian Grenier got famous Evie and I had been best friends for nearly a decade.

We were best friends who'd fused, Siamese-like, until we weren't sure of our own identities without the other.

I sometimes wonder if Evie invented the insurance scheme because it was too painful to confront our dissolving friendship maturely; rather, she had to wreck it at once. End it forever.

We stopped talking for a whole year after college, in 2004.

During this time Adrian started his work on “Entourage,” and Evie moved to New York, while I stayed back in North Carolina for a year before moving to Boston in the summer of 2005.

We’d finally escaped our small town, but without each other.

Sometimes Evie would call me in the middle of the night. I’d wake and hear her breathing on the other end.

Evie, I’d say, and she’d hang up.

She still thought of me, like I still thought of her. But I couldn’t forgive her. A random prank phone call in the middle of the night was the last language we had left.

For a time, Evie worked at a cafe in Brooklyn. And who should come in one afternoon?

It was Adrian, she told me once in the single real phone call a year we place to each other.

The light was shining on him, she said. He looked like an angel.

I could remember years earlier, when we first saw him. How Evie believed it wasn’t even him. He was too much, too beautiful.

What happened next? I asked her.

He came up to order, she said. And all I could say was, Hi, Adrian. He looked at me for a long while. Then he said, Do I know you? And I nodded. And he said: Evie?

Now it's impossible to open a magazine without seeing Adrian Grenier. It's been over a decade since we met him, and Evie and I will never again be friends. We'll always share a permanent connection, for we spent years trusting no one but each other, encouraging each other's incorrigible behavior, exposing our hidden dreams and fears, but our meeting with Adrian had been the apex of our friendship. Everything after was just the coming down, was the growing up.

We were like that single image of Adrian, the one from Seventeen that got us hooked. He was so young, then, not yet famous. His number was listed and he was still a little broke, carrying around a Gucci condom holder like prophecy. He was on the cusp of something and, like us, would never be the same again.