

Stalking Love, From Craigslist To Starbucks

Contributed by Matt Katz
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I had to see for myself.

So I walked up to the Starbucks counter, ordered a coffee for \$48 and settled into a chair. When my friends (let's call them M&M) arrived, they glanced in my direction, smiled slightly and turned away, pretending not to know me.

M&M (who are women, incidentally) were here to meet the guy they just picked up on Craigslist. And I was here to spy on them.

Two weeks earlier, M&M posted an ad on Craigslist, the massively popular online message board available almost everywhere on Earth. On Craigslist you can sell your tractor-trailer and complain about the mid-term elections -- or you can do something actually interesting, like look for members of the opposite (or not so opposite) sex.

This was M&M's ad on the "women seeking men" page:

Adventure seeking hipster needed to complete attendance on a four-seater plane. My husband and I have a four-person plane. We also have an adorable single girlfriend who is afraid to fly with us. You get the idea.

So if you are interested in meeting and holding the hand of our lovely friend while also experiencing an amazing flying adventure, please inquire so we can schedule an interview.

Does this actually happen? And does it actually work?!?

Yes. And sometimes. I hate to get all sentimental, but these are not the good old days of online dating. Men are now constantly victimized by bogus profiles and messages luring us into porn sites and shady Web cam portals.

A friend -- and no, I am not the "friend" -- recently contacted seven women on Craigslist's "Casual Encounters" page. He got seven responses -- all with links to pay porn sites. On MySpace, messages fill my inbox daily from random women with provocative pictures and a link to "a Web site where you can see the rest of me."

Men can find the porn just fine without your help, thank you very much.

Fortunately, it's not all fake women out there. The good (and cute, by the way) women are online, and the men (not all cute, by the way) are still interested. M&M got more than 100 responses to their post from guys who ran the spectrum of

normalcy.

There was one who sent a picture of himself flexing in his kitchen next to a Miller Lite, a bottle of disinfectant and a bag of hot dog rolls. And then there was the guy wearing his hat backward as he played poker in what appeared to be an office break room, with an overflowing ashtray of Marlboro Menthols and a can of Yuengling Lager next to him.

But the hilarity didn't end with the pictures. A poet began his e-mail with: "by some cosmic fluke, some (if not all persons) consider me a kook."

So now you know why I just had to go to Starbucks. Only one guy earned an interview with M&M -- a soft-spoken teacher with glasses and a mildly effeminate voice. He dressed like a 2006 hipster, as requested.

I kept my iPod headphones in with no music on and pretended to read a day-old newspaper as I listened to their conversation at the table next to me. I felt like a big-time private investigator. Or at least a stalker.

The girls began: "Tell us about your adventurous lifestyle."

Oooh, rough opening. I was worried about my boy.

He was out on a blind date with two women -- one of whom is married -- and now he was twirling his hair, unsure of what they meant by "adventurous."

Then, with a little jolt from his Starbucks buzz, he fell into a smooth rhythm when they asked why he contacted them.

"I was just bored, and I saw your ad and it seemed so strange," he explained.

"Is this what you envisioned? Two insane girls?" they asked.

"Pretty much," he said, without missing a beat.

Unfortunately, real life ultimately interrupted his game. That same week the single M met another guy in the old-fashioned way, and they're now dating.

Craigslist Boy might get another shot down the road, but meanwhile I bet he's just happy that this time, Craigslist didn't lead him to some nasty Web site, credit card in hand. Instead, he got a cup of coffee and a few laughs, with a private investigator sitting nearby no less!

Now isn't that what the Internet is supposed to be all about?

This column appeared in the Courier-Post and Gannett newspapers nationwide. Graphic from LiquidLibrary.com.