

In a city with 122 Starbucks and more than that many sky-rise dwelling stars, it was just a matter of time before I witnessed the two constellations collide.

It happened in a Starbucks just north of Washington Square Park; it was there that I realized that in a city where countless celebrities seek shelter from their fame amid the cast of hundreds in the city's streets, anonymity for the famous is all an act. After all, a mega-star like Mr. Big does not have his morning joe at a Starbucks a limo's length away from the New York University campus if he does not want to be noticed.

I assumed (or rather, hoped) that he would not recognize me. In this city of millions of faces, it could easily have been some other attractive girl with large, dark eyes and straight, brown hair who had, nearly a year ago, drunkenly proclaimed her love for him as he strolled through the parting crowd at the downtown Manhattan bar which he owns.

“Big! Big! I love you!” I slurred that shameful night as I tugged on his silky, black sweater, batted my adoring, doe-eyes, and nearly kissed his shiny shoes (but the bar was too crowded). He shook me from his sweater without so much as looking my way. “But you're my *favorite!*” I said. He kept walking. Then, like any woman scorned, I shouted to his back, “You are so RUDE! You should be nicer to your fans.” But I assumed he did not hear me; by then he and his snooty attitude were nearly out the door.

Now, altered by caffeine instead of alcohol, we meet again. Like most women scorned, I quickly forgave Mr. Big for my last dismissal. One year had passed and I was no longer a bedazzled Michigan émigré—I assured myself—I was a New Yorker.

So, there I stood, hot coffee in one hand, a stack of schoolwork in the other, staring straight at one of the sexiest men on television as he read the *New York Times* and

unobtrusively murmured into his cell phone. All of the tables were taken, so I blocked out my disgraceful past and did what any other 24-year-old, “Sex in the City” fiend would do: I calmly asked Chris Noth if I could share his.

“Nice new mustache,” I said as I took a seat and shoved aside his papers to make room for my own. No—I’m not crazy; sober, I’m normally not even that out-going. But I had nothing to lose: the day had just begun and I had already, in the wee morning hours, broken up with my boyfriend of two years, locked myself out of my apartment and, still dazed with luckless wonder, cracked my cell-phone when, mid-drop, a passerby with perfect timing kicked it clear across the sidewalk. Even if Big had said no, at least I could say he talked to me.

But he winked and nodded and I all but fainted but kept my cool and put my on my headphones, blaring Coltrane through my brain, and tried to concentrate on my schoolwork as I sat with this super-sexy star who, experience reminds me, is not known to be very friendly to his fans. Wait . . . his lips are moving . . . is he talking to me?

“What?” I asked, turning off my music.

“What are you studying?” he repeated, peering over the *Nation* section.

“I am a graduate journalism student at NYU.”

“I hate journalists.”

“I will never be that kind,” I crossed my fingers and lied.

And I could see the exasperation in his face when an over-zealous fan galloped up to him with a still-packaged disposable camera, excused himself for interrupting our “meeting” (yes, I *was* someone special) and pleaded breathlessly: “Would it be okay if I could have my picture taken with you, Mr. Noth?” This poor boy was going about it all

wrong! I wanted to pull him aside and whisper in his ear: Be cooler! Be calmer! Swallow your enthusiasm like me! But I just smiled smugly and watched the scene transpire.

Chris shook his head; he sat on his hands; he looked at me apologetically. (Was I supposed to save him? I was just a fan myself . . .) When the photo was finally snapped and the gawky fan gone, he turned to me and confided how much he hated when that happened. “But when they are so persistent I can’t say no—they just won’t go away,” he said.

I nodded sympathetically, as if I knew how he felt; as if *I* would never act that way; as if Chris and I chilled on a regular basis (would he ask me for my number?).

We continued to banter like old friends. Me—acting like he was nobody. He—acting like I was somebody. He read me article leads from the *Times*; I asked him about his next project. He asked me what kind of journalist I wanted to be: “Carrie without the shoe-fetish,” to which he smiled and replied—*but that is all fantasy*.

(What, was this real?)

One coffee refill and two hours later, he wished me luck in school and left without asking for my name or my number. (A romantic incognito encounter? Let me at least pretend.)

Alone at the table, the incongruities and similarities between the famous and their fans hit me. Even for an anonymous graduate student like myself, privacy in New York City is an impossible dream: I was reminded of this when my (ex)boyfriend ran out of my apartment at 5 AM and my doorman called up to see if I was okay.

Likewise, loneliness in New York City is a poignant reality, even for a handsome television star like Chris Noth. Maybe he had his morning coffee at a Starbucks

surrounded by 51,901 students because he wanted to be noticed; or maybe, like the rest of us, he just wanted some company.