

Hey, Roxy." ■ Roxy swings up Broadway, head held high, smoking a Newport Light. She's blonde, voluptuous, 16, wearing a tight tank top that says NAIVE, bra straps showing. It's a muggy night at the end of summer, and the kids are out on the street, looking for each other. Everybody seems to know Roxy. ■ "Today," she's telling me, walking fast, "there are so many girls out there who don't know how to get respect." ■ Outside the Gap on 86th Street, a pack of boys in shorts and baggy Ts are draped around a public phone. ■ "Hey, Roxy." ■ "Certain girls think they're gonna get fame by getting nice with certain boys. But they're just playing"—undermining—"themselves," Roxy is saying. Her real name is something less provocative; she asks me to call her "Roxy." "Whassup?" Roxy extends her neck,

accepting soft kisses on each cheek.

"Where you goin'?" asks one of the boys, mouth suppressing a smile. He gently takes her hand.

Roxy's holding her keys; the boy snatches them and Roxy runs after him, wobbling on platform sandals.

"Give them back!" she screams.

"Don't play yourself, Roxy."

A couple of girls stop by to watch Roxy twirl around. The boy jingles her keys in front of her like bait. Adults pass by, steeped in after-dinner conversations, carrying groceries; the kids are invisible

the girl who has any sex at all. She's the one who gets talked about, either way, branded almost as conspicuously as Hester Prynne, whom these kids will be reading about, at some point, in their schooling.

Among private-school kids in New York, there has never been so much sex, or so much talk about sex. Kids talk about girls who give "buffs" or boys who "run a train"—that is, have sex with a girl three or four or five in a row at some party or free crib, an apartment with no parents. They line up outside the door. "It gets ill," one kid says, using that word

that can convey either something great or something sick. They talk about orgies.

The stories get passed around, but not in some sixties-style celebration of free love; more in the gossipy, censorious tone of a tabloid—"guess what *she* did." And then: "She's a ho." Meanwhile, sleeping around turns boys into "players," meaning they have more power and will get more sex.

"There are six degrees of separation between kids in New York," says one girl, a student at Columbia Prep. "Everybody knows who everybody's had sex with, and everything is reputation."

"IF YOU FOOL AROUND, IT GETS TWISTED AND 10,000 PEOPLE HEAR

to them. "Her reputation hurt me," one of the girls says. "So I deaded her. I can't chill with her anymore. She's a ho." This girl calls Roxy the "queen of buffs," or blow jobs. Another girl spray-painted something to that effect on Roxy's apartment building.

Roxy comes back, face flushed; she flashes her keys. "Come on," she says, tossing her head.

"Who you looking at?" she yells at the girls, full-throated.

At their Upper West Side private school, they got into some "beef," which ended in a fight. "I smacked that bitch in the face."

"She knows she's cheating on her boyfriend," Roxy says, loudly, "and he's cheating on her!"

We walk west, toward Riverside Park. "I know somebody who sucked her boyfriend's dick." Roxy's hands shake as she lights another cigarette.

"I hate men," she says.

WOMEN HAVE ALWAYS HAD TO CONTENT with the idea of the "slut"—or, as New York kids would call her, "ho," "trock," "hoochie." She's supposedly the girl who has "too much" sex, or sometimes she's

Certain names and identifying details have been changed.

"If you fool around, it gets twisted and 10,000 people hear about it," says another girl, a Beekman student. She says this makes her scared to do anything sexual—"but I'm a virgin and that still gets me trashed."

"I treat 'em how I meet 'em," a boy tells me. "If you meet 'em and the girl's sucking my man's dick in the bathroom, then they're gonna get treated like that. But let them do what they want to," he adds. "Maybe I'll cash in."

He dares to talk this way, in part, because he is a boy who's considered to have "fame." Reporting on kids in New York for nearly a year, I've heard this word used often. I suppose it should come as no surprise that the culture of celebrity has overtaken high school; the only thing missing is the paparazzi. But, ever resourceful, kids provide for that themselves, frequently videotaping their exploits, including sexual ones. "Sometimes [boys] tape-record it and play it for their friends," says a girl.

The proximity of private-school students to actual celebrities in New York raises the stakes still higher. A girl tells me about a friend who had sex with a member of the Mets; she met him in a club. "If a guy fucks a model, then other girls want to fuck him," says Josh, 18, a student at Horace Mann. "They think it gives them props"—respect. "Girls sweat

older guys who are actors or athletes," says Robin, 16. Shoshana Lonstein, once "Jerry Seinfeld's 17-year-old girlfriend," is an object of envy. She went to Nightingale-Bamford and met him while rollerblading in Central Park. Her parents approved of the match.

What few adults are aware of are the other stars in these kids' universe: the "certain boys" Roxy speaks of, who belong to crews, mini-gangs that have become a powerful subculture in New York private schools. Since crews take their "styles" from harder gangs in tougher neighborhoods, many kids consider them laughable. But if it sometimes seems like a game, then it has become a dangerous one: mugging, robbing, fighting, drug dealing. And thugging—having sex with as many girls, preferably "fly," or attractive, girls, as possible. And in turn, "being in a crew that has props seriously increases your chances of getting laid," says David, 16, a Riverdale student.

"Girl will be like, 'Oh, I hooked up with Lash' or 'I hooked up with Rish,'" says Jamie, 15, naming two "famous" members of an East Side crew.

"To have a social life, you have to be down with these people," says Laura, 15, a York Prep student, "because if you're

"great bartender." It's a hot night, and they are all wearing tank tops with a lot of cleavage, tight pants, and a lot of makeup. "We're going bar-hopping later," Jennifer explains. "We're gonna get trashed tonight."

Alex is talking about the night in Central Park when a friend of hers, very drunk and high, met up with some boys in a crew and then "ruined her life."

"And suddenly before I know, she's, like, under a bridge with these three guys, and legend has it they went in the woods and they did all kinds of unbelievable stuff, and she came back with this reputation for being the biggest chickenhead slut. She can't even go in the park now."

"I got pissed off. I was like, what the hell do you think you're doing? I grabbed her arm. But the boys were like, 'No, let's take her for a walk. . . .'"

Jennifer and Carrie shake their heads. "When she does that, she should know what she's getting into," says Carrie matter-of-factly.

Jennifer tells me she wants to make sure I understand how important a part girls play in the world of crews. "We're not just there. We have a *role*," she says. "They'd be nothing without us."

The other girls nod in agreement. "Who do you think babies them and holds their head over the toilet?" says Alex.

"Or gets them into bars?" Jennifer says. "If you're with a good-looking girl, you have a much better chance of getting into a bar." Most often, however, they say, the boys have fake I.D.'s, and get them into the bars, and order the drinks.

"At the end of the night," Carrie says, "if they've trashed somebody's house, the girls are like, 'We're sorry,' 'Thank you very much,' and we help clean up."

"They diss us," says Jennifer resignedly. "They call us chickenheads and sluts and all that, but we're the ones they want to be chilling with at the end of the night." Which may be at someone's house, or at a hotel room someone has rented. There are myriad lies to tell parents about where they are. Tonight, they're supposed to be with each other watching videos.

"They do fun things," Alex adds, a bit defensively, of boys in crews. "It's, you know, fun to chill with them."

"Today they wanted me to come to rack a supermarket with them." Jennifer rolls her eyes, but something in her tone says she's a little proud of it. "You know, to be the girl 'just shopping'?" To distract the salespeople's attention. "They didn't ask me in a *disrespectful* way," she says. "They need us more than they let on."

"They get really territorial about us," says Alex.

not you're considered a Herb—a nerd, a type of anathema—"and you're not going to bars or parties or chilling in the middle of the Meadow."

Not every girl wants to be down with crews; but crews act as a kind of social ruling class that sets an agenda with which every girl must reckon. It's a double bind: If you want to "get fame," as a girl, you "hook up with" a famous crew member. You may still be many things after that—an athlete, a student, a friend—but now, in this brutal landscape, you can be called a "whore."

"If a girl goes out and has sex with a guy then she's a whore," says Paul, 17, telling the truth about the way it is. And there will be talk, not just by boys but by other girls.

"Have you ever been called a ho?" one girl asks me, her voice trembling with emotion. "Ho' is so . . . *strong*."

IT'S A FRIDAY NIGHT. JENNIFER, ALEX, AND Carrie huddle in the back booth of a loud, smoky Irish bar, one of those places along Second Avenue where kids go. These girls are all 15, but they say they never have problems getting drinks here. A few customers in the crowd are still wearing braces. The girls are sipping fuzzy navels, their favorite drink of late. "Vodka, peach schnapps, and orange juice," Jennifer says. She says she's a

ABOUT IT. BUT I'M A VIRGIN, AND THAT STILL GETS ME TRASHED."

"Like a dog pees on his ground?" adds Jennifer.

ROXY LEANS BACK AGAINST THE MARBLE ledge of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument at 89th Street. She's drinking a forty, a 40-ounce bottle of beer. Little beads of sweat collect on her forehead. She watches all the other kids hanging out on the stairs, drinking, smoking, talking low so you can't quite hear what they're saying. They're rolling blunts. Their laughter wafts over the night air.

Roxy says, "People talk so much shit, it's like I can't stand to be around them." She has changed schools three times. The rumors follow her everywhere: that she has given "buffs" to more than 50 guys; etc. "I guess you heard about it," she tells me.

"It all started," she says, with an older boy named Greg. He was "famous," a pre-eminent member of a West Side crew. "He's a user," Roxy says, "a schemer." Girls are often wanted to assist in running credit-card scams—which has almost become a sport, like Frisbee—because as girls they're less likely to be suspected. "And me, I was so stupid, I was like, 'No, I don't want anything out of it.'" Roxy mocks her former self. "I'll just do it for kicks, whatever."

She got busted, and now she's working

Liz tells me, "in the art of sheistiness." Being sheisty means being able to get over on other people, whether by taking money from them or getting them to do you favors, or getting them to have sex.

"You learn to be sheisty by getting played," Liz says; she talks very rapidly. "Anyone who's sheisty has been sheisted in the past—

"I was. I'm not even gonna front—" But she doesn't want to go into it.

"A sheisty girl knows you don't have to be able to fight if you know how to use your mouth. We have a vagina and tits and ass, and I would never want to be a guy because with what we have we can do anything—men always want us, so it's easier to gas them," or lie.

Liz blows smoke from her nostrils. "Truly sheisty boys know that.

"You have to make them think you're one of the guys," she continues. "For a girl to get accepted, she has to be down and dirty. They have to see you not give a shit, not be a priss—be like a man, basically.

"To be a cool girl you kind of have to stab girlkind in the back."

She snuffs out her cigarette in the mouth of an ashtray shaped like a frog.

I notice that on the floor, among the fashion magazines, there's a magazine

with a cover about girls who cut themselves because of depression or anger. "Yeah, I did that," says Liz, pulling down her sock to show two small red scars on her ankle. "I don't know why . . ." Her voice trails off. "One day I just got so upset and I wanted to cut myself."

"MOLDING MUD, SUN-IN, TAMPAX, DEXATrim, Slim Fast, Listerine, Advil, batteries, Nice'N'Easy, Visine—"

Julie, 16, pulls the items out of the shopping bag, holding them up for view like a woman on a TV commercial, displaying them with an Ultra-Bright smile. There's \$472.93 worth of goods from a pharmacy chain spilled over the bedroom floor—all purchased with a forged check. The check belonged to a morose-looking, balding fellow who lives in the East Village and no longer has his checkbook. The girls say they "found it in the back of a cab," along with his driver's license, which they needed to copy his signature.

"You got a Style Dryer?" says Julie. She's crunching a Kit-Kat.

"Yeah, but you got film," Abigail says quickly. Abigail is heavysset, "kind of a Herb," Julie tells me before our meeting. A virgin.

It was no accident that it was Abigail

"FOR A GIRL TO GET ACCEPTED, SHE HAS TO BE DOWN AND DIRTY."

to pay back her father, a television producer, several hundred dollars. "He'll never trust me again," she says.

"He ruined my life," she says of Greg. When she sees him now, she "looks the other way." "I really liked him. But . . ." She shrugs, elbows on knees. "You can't trust anybody."

The horn of a tugboat sounds lonely across the river. "I can't wait to get out of New York."

"YOU'VE ONLY BEEN TALKING TO CHICKEN-heads. Those girls haven't learned," another girl tells me. Her name is Liz. She's sitting cross-legged on her bed. Behind her on the wall is a corkboard crammed with push pins and photographs of herself with other girls—she giggles, "Look, I'm so fucked up there"—as well as a certain type of boy often seen in baggy jeans and puffy parka. Their graffiti tags, scrawled in colored markers on scraps of paper, are posted here and there. There's a stack of SAT prep guides on her desk.

Liz lights a cigarette. It's okay to smoke; her mother and father are not home, and won't be until quite late. She is small and dark, wearing sweat pants and a Polo T. She's 17, but looks young for her age.

There are girls who fight back against the tyranny of crew mentality—by joining it. "You have to become schooled,"

who performed the most dangerous role in the scheme, telling the salespeople at the pharmacy that her "father"—the morose-looking, balding man—had okayed the shopping trip. "He's at home sick, and I have to get all this stuff tonight because I'm going on a trip to Paris tomorrow," Abigail says they told the clerk.

"Where'd you get all that stuff?" says Julie's mother; she is standing at the door, holding a long metal spoon. She just got home from work—she's a real-estate agent—and has been in the kitchen, throwing together dinner.

"Abigail bought it," Julie says.

Abigail simpers.

Julie's mother frowns. "Uh-huh," she says, and returns to the kitchen.

A third girl, Elena, is sprawled on a chaise longue, smoking a cigarette, cat-eyed. She is "famous"—the long-term girlfriend of one of the most "famous" crew leaders in New York. With the looks of a model, Elena has actual famous people, young Hollywood actors, asking her out. She does the club scene. When Julie phoned her up to boast about their haul from the pharmacy, Elena had to come over and check it out. She is known for being one of the "queens of sheistiness," a girl who has seen tens of thousands of dollars' worth of goods pass through her hands, from "racking," shoplifting, "CC"—credit-

card—scams, other cons. “I never pay for anything,” she says. “I’m the greediest person in the world.” Her parents have plenty of money.

She wants to go out tonight and run the checkbook game again.

However, there’s a problem with this agenda. Abigail, in a moment of nervousness, threw the checkbook down a sidewalk grate as she and Julie were running away from the store, toting their stolen toiletries.

Julie is now furiously tying a bathtub stopper to the end of a very long piece of twine. “We’re gonna fish it out,” she says, winding duct tape from a roll, sticky side up, around the bathtub stopper.

“This is dope,” she congratulates herself.

“It looks like a sex toy,” says Elena.

The girls laugh.

“I’ll be back in a minute, Mom!” Julie yells, halfway out the front door. Elena and Abigail follow.

From the kitchen: “What about dinner?” *Slam.*

ON A SHADOWY SIDE STREET ON THE UPPER East Side, Julie shines a flashlight down the grate. It’s next to some garbage cans, just outside a brownstone. “It’s scary down there,” says Abigail.

THEY HAVE TO SEE YOU NOT BE A PRISS—BE LIKE A MAN, BASICALLY.”

The girls peer into the hole. The checkbook is twelve feet down, tossed amid filth. Julie, crouching, passes her bathtub stopper through the metal slats, training it down by the string. She swings it toward the checkbook.

“Ooh!” says Abigail. “You almost got it!” It’s like one of those games at a state fair. The checkbook fixes to the stopper momentarily, but then falls away.

“Damn!” says Julie.

Adults pass by, going home to their own brownstones; some glance over, curious. “I dropped a ring,” Elena smiles, hiding her cigarette behind her back. How cute, the adults’ faces seem to say; it’s like the Hardy Girls.

“Shit.” Julie sputters with exasperation. The tape isn’t strong enough.

“Hey, wait! There’s a ladder. . . .” An iron ladder runs down the wall into the darkness below. “Cool!”

A bundle of energy, an athlete, Julie tears the metal cover off the grate, knocking trash cans to one side. But there’s a pause as the girls consider who’s going to go down.

“Abigail?” says Elena.

“Not me!” Abigail frets.

“I, uh—” Julie looks worriedly into the abyss.

“Oh, all right, I’ll go,” says Elena. “Because I have *dick.*”

“I have dick!” says Julie.

“Oh, Julie, you’re so much better at this stuff than me,” Elena coaxes. “I’m *such* a spaz.”

Julie, in Nikes, steps hesitantly down the ladder.

“I got your back,” Elena says with a smile.

Julie’s back is toward a dark doorway leading underneath the building; it’s full of garbage in there, who knows what else.

“What if there’s some homeless man hiding in there, and he comes out and grabs you?” says Abigail.

Julie looks up. “Shut up!” she says.

Apprehensive, she jumps down, scoops up the checkbook, and scrambles back up the ladder.

“Wait!” She pauses at the top of the rungs. “Take a picture!” she orders Abigail.

Abigail snaps a Polaroid, with Julie’s stolen film.

LATER, AT AN UPPER EAST SIDE SUSHI RESTAURANT, Elena grabs my tape recorder and says, “I’ll interview Abigail.”

Abigail tries to protest, her mouth full of California roll.

“Are you a virgin?” Elena demands.

“Yeah,” Abigail says.

“For what reasons are you still a virgin?” says Elena.

“I don’t want to do it with some random person.”

“Are you going to wait till you get *married?*” Elena pushes.

“Well, not till I get married.”

“Have you ever had the *opportunity* to have sex?”

“Yeah.”

“How do you handle it when you don’t want to?” Now, Elena sounds less aggressive.

Abigail is firm. “I just say I don’t want to.”

Elena thinks a moment, stops. She turns off the tape recorder. “I feel like a fucking schmuck doing this.”

I tell her, I know the feeling.

Outside, after dinner, Elena leans against a car, waiting for the other girls to come out of the restaurant.

“You start being sheisty,” she tells me, “to let the guys know, like, the whole time, you might have been playing *them.*”

“When I was young,” she says, “I would have sex with this one and that one and that one. Sixteen-year-old guys when I was 13 years old, 22-year-olds when I was 15! I looked at myself and called *myself* a whore.” She stares off, pursing her lips. “You don’t meet a guy, hang out with him for a few hours in a club and then fuck him. . . .”

“You don’t do that.”

I TELL MY FRIENDS OR COLLEAGUES SOME of what I hear about what's going on. "You must be exaggerating. It can't be like this," they say.

It can. The model Bijou Phillips, who is 17 and grew up in New York, recently appeared in "Page Six" of the *New York Post*. "The wild child got herself kicked out of Spy [Bar] for good on Wednesday night after exposing herself, assaulting a friend with a sex toy and getting into a brawl," the gossip column reported. "When she was asked to leave, the argument moved to the sidewalk, where she was overheard telling her enraged galpal, 'So I raped with you—deal with it.'"

The video for "Criminal," a song by Fiona Apple, 19—another New York-private-school alumna (she went to Rhodes)—is getting a lot of play on MTV. In the video, Fiona, ghoulishly pale and thin, can be seen flung half-naked across a floor, a bed, a guy's lap, as faceless boys and girls, with whom she seems to have just had sex, pay her no attention. She caresses them. Her eyes are glazed and haunting.

Fiona sings:

"Heaven help me for the way I am / Save me from the evil deeds. . . ."

he considers them younger and less experienced. They're all arguing over the definition of a "shook one." Juan turns around. That's a girl "who likes sex. She likes it."

"They want, like, three guys on them at one time," says Cheddar.

"They'll call you up and be like, 'I need dick, I need to get fucked,'" Matthew says.

They are not girlfriend material, according to the boys. "You're not going to go out with a girl who's a shookie," Cheddar explains.

Juan passes back the blunt. A scar curves down the side of his left cheek. Known as a "buck-fifty," it's the result of a razor fight. Girls like it, Juan tells me, because "with that on your grill, they think you're hard."

"I have a way with girls," he says simply. He tells them he models, and apparently they believe it, despite his flaw. After he's been away for hours, days, sometimes, he'll tell his girlfriend he's been "at a modeling shoot."

Matthew, 17, scrunches forward to tell him, "You have no idea how many girls have asked us if they can chill with you guys"—Juan's crew. "Like, 'Put me on. I want to fuck Juan.' *Literally.*"

Juan smiles.

At 76th and Broadway, Matthew and Cheddar jump out and run into a deli; Snapples and cigarettes. Juan watches them with some amusement. "These niggas don't even know how ill it gets. . . ."

He lights up a cigarette with the look of a man with stories to tell. He tells me then about "Shook Ones Part Four." (Juan and his crew brothers have a shook-ones "hall of fame" and have inaugurated "shookies of the year." The girls involved are unaware of being awarded these distinctions.)

"Shook Ones Part Four was so open, B. I hit this girl for two years straight. Any place you can think of, on a bus, in a cab.

"One time we roped her with like eight people in my man Steve's house. Four girls, four guys. We're chilling, mad high. And I was like 'Yo, give me buffs'—right in front of everybody. And she was like, 'Word.' And everybody's like, 'Ah!' And she does it, I'm telling you. It gets raw like that. . . ."

"The mom came home and we all had to jet into the bedroom. The mom was just in her room—in the mist."

Juan says, "I love my girlfriend."

He thinks. "But I don't know. For a shookie, you feel . . . something."

"There was this one, she was really on point—like I still think about her, and it's

"THEY LEFT THEIR UNDERWEAR ON. THEY WERE LYING IN A CIRCLE

"SOME GIRLS CAME THROUGH. ONE OF THEM was that singer"—Todd, 18, names a name—"and another was that girl on the sitcom. . . ." He can't think of hers.

It was a party at a free crib where everyone was taking "huge amounts of" ecstasy—or MDMA, an amphetamine said to make the user want to have sex.

"The girls all took their clothes off. They left their underwear on. They were kind of lying in a circle on the floor. They asked us guys to rub lotion on them, so we were rubbing lotion on them through their bras and panties. We didn't want to force anything. Then they took everything off, and everybody started" giving each other oral sex. "Then everybody started fucking." Todd blinks. "When we all came down, we were just, like, looking at each other, like, damn. What we did."

THE SOUND SYSTEM IN THE BOOMER, A CHAUFFEURED rental car from a service in Harlem, blasts the Notorious B.I.G.: "*You nasty boy, you nasty*—" The boys drive around; it's like they're in some floating bar.

We're stuck in midtown traffic; it's late. Juan, 19, works his shoulders, fists pounding the air to the beats. He nods and speaks along with the lyric: "*Screaming, she fiending, for the semen*—"

In the back seat there are two private-school boys. Juan calls them his "sons"—

like, damn, this bitch rocked my whole world."

She was Shook Ones Part Seven.

"She got so nice, B., she was so open, she got me so open. Steve and me, we had her once for three hours, at Ricky's free crib. Steve just couldn't handle it anymore, but me and her just stayed skied up"—coked up—"fucking for like four more hours, until it got light out. I kind of fell asleep. And then I looked over and she was just there looking at me, and we just . . ."

He grows quiet. "Ah. It was ill."

Matthew and Cheddar climb back in the car.

"These girls are just bottling it up," Cheddar says breezily, opening his Snapple. "One day they'll be like 30 years old and they'll realize like 'Yo, that shit fucked me up, like I was like the derelict ho of life.'"

Juan smiles a little. "Like, later in life, when I see her with her kids . . ."

"You'll be, like, laughing," Cheddar says.

"Like when I see her husband," Juan says, eyes growing bright, "I'll be like, 'Son, I know your wife inside and out. On the real.'"

THE "ILLEST FREE CRIB OF ALL TIME," THE one of "legend," kids tell me, was Ricky's. Ricky's free crib is mentioned as if it were

some international incident, some battle, in a history book. This was last summer. Ricky's mother was gone for two weeks on a trip to Asia. "It was such a craze," Ricky says, over a hamburger at an Upper East Side joint.

Ricky was 16 back then. He was a private-school student—he has since dropped out. He's a drug dealer now.

He had made the acquaintance of some older boys who were dealing; they were "famous," they belonged to "hard" crews. "Fuzzy would come over at like four in the morning after he was out all night doing runs"—deliveries, Ricky says. "He'd have a bag of ecstasy. Steve would come over and chop up a rock"—of coke—"on my mother's coffee table. . . . And they'd both have, like, ten girls."

"My mother found condoms everywhere, stuffed under beds. It was disgusting. I got kicked out."

And it was there, at Ricky's free crib, everyone knows, that Shook Ones Part Seven "ruined her life."

"SHE GOT TURNED OUT," SAYS STEVE.

Steve, slick-haired, lanky, and languid and always wearing sunglasses, went to public school; he started dealing coke, he says, "because in this city if you want to

ON THE FLOOR. THEY ASKED US GUYS TO RUB LOTION ON THEM."

have a good time, you have to have money, you know." He says he has dealt to some private-school kids' parents.

Steve says, "Greg brought her over." That is, Shook Ones Part Seven. Lily was her name. She was being "roped by Greg exclusive" until last summer; but then Greg told the other, older boys chilling at Ricky's free crib—guys he wanted to be down with—"Yo, she's shook, she can get down like that." He brought her by.

"Everybody had sex with her," says Steve. "All my crew." He names six boys. "They would be giving her ecstasy and shit." Steve gave her coke. She was already having problems with her parents. Her father was strict, a wealthy, self-made man. When Lily didn't return home for a few days, missing the end of the school year, she was kicked out.

"After that, she just didn't give a fuck about anything. Where was she supposed to go, yo?"

So Steve got her a job, "dancing, all nude"—at a place not far from her dad's office. Customers would take her in the champagne room; she'd give Steve some of her take. "Why spend my dough?" he asks. "I was blessing her with mad coke, too. I listened to her problems."

Steve takes a long, lazy drag from his cigarette, and smiles. "She needed someone to keep her sanity."

LILY HERSELF IS DOING FINE. SHE HAS worked through a lot with her family, changed schools. She doesn't talk to the boys from Ricky's free crib much anymore. "I think I've outgrown them," she says.

"They think I'm weak, but they're not the powerful ones. I don't worship them.

"They think they're famous, but who are they, really? They just sit around and talk about who they know and about money. They're always trying to fuck each other over. I really wonder where some of them will be in five years."

She doesn't mind talking about Ricky's free crib. "In the sixties, people had free love and sex. I wanted to try it out. I used protection. It was fun.

"They're intimidated by the fact that a girl can actually enjoy sex, because that makes a girl powerful.

"What fucked me up was everybody talking shit about me. I'd hear shit from kids I didn't even know—shit that wasn't even true. It was ruined by the embellishing, all the stories. I thought what we were doing was just between us. I didn't think they'd tell everyone.

"It ruined it," Lily says again.

"But," she says, "I am not 'ruined.' I don't think I'm a bad person. I'm a genuine person.

"I'm not going to get paranoid.

"I don't think every guy in the world is out to hurt me."

JULIE, THE CHECKBOOK THIEF, CALLS ME UP, excited. She thinks she has fallen in love.

"He's 18. He's famous and shit, but he doesn't give a shit about all that. He's in a bunch of crews, but he doesn't push it. He's so on the low. He's so dope."

Last night, they took ecstasy for the first time together. They walked along the river. "My body was all tingly. He said, Imagine you're the water. We just sat on the benches, watching the waves.

"We started talking about how first times are the best. I told him what it's like to be in love. I said, When you love someone, you're willing to do anything for them. . . . But I told him my heart had been broken before.

"'Can I take the pain away?' he said. 'Are you ready?' I said, 'Yeah.' He put his hand on my heart. I felt love come into me from his hand. He said he felt it, too. He felt like he was falling.

"I was so happy when I went to sleep. I woke up and it was still there. But then . . ." They saw each other the next day, and something had already changed.

"Do you think he was just playing me?" asks Julie. There's a catch in her voice.

"Do you think it was real?"