

ALICE SELLS DIAMONDS ON 42ND STREET, \$10 A bag. Twisted up in plastic like a piece of candy, each diamond is a hit of crack cocaine, enough to keep a buyer high for a little while. Alice is tall and serene, more handsome than pretty in a long auburn wig and purple hat. The harsh light of the porn theater reveals the beginnings of stubble. A man in a gray suit, about 35 and very white, approaches. He won't look her in the eye. "Let me get two," he mutters. ■ "Hey, girl. What up with that *hat*?" This customer is a hustler, red bandanna tied up in a bow on the front of his head. He swings a hip at Alice. ■ "I only got *nine*—" he says, flashing wrinkled bills. "All right, bitch," Alice sighs in her low, murmuring voice. "You don't like the hat?" She touches her cheek demurely. "It works with my outfit." ■ Around midtown, all the crackheads know Alice. The 30-year-old drag queen has her own stoop in Hell's Kitchen; she's there every night. It's 3 A.M. now, the "thirsty hour." They will swarm, Alice says, like "roaches on bread." ■ Alice used to work for FedEx, but now she's a crackhead, smokes off and on, she says, has been for the past ten years. "I've seen what crack can do," she says, weaving down 42nd Street. "I've seen people go from sugar to shit." ■ The customers aren't allowed to stop in front of her more than one at a time, so they wander up and down the sidewalk, pacing aimlessly. First comes an Italian-Irish mechanic who says he works for Mercedes-Benz. Then a drunk, chubby blond guy in shorts being yanked along by a transvestite hooker. An Indian newsstand salesman asks Alice if she will meet him at 3:30, to "do things forcibly." ■ "Skirt or pants?" Alice says. Alice stuffs

the Cra up

**At 13, he dreamed
of being a gangster.**

Now he is one.

**But the life is
harder than it looked.**

**The inside story of
a hotshot dealer.**

by Nancy Jo Sales

money in her *bustier*, telling no one in particular, "I'm caught in the middle of good and evil."

The crowd bunches up. "Go down the street! Y'all don't have any consideration for me, y'all want me to go to jail."

"Of course not!" says the Indian newsstand salesman. He bends down and kisses Alice's brown suede shoe.

"Most people who do crack started out on coke," Alice says, throwing diamonds down. Her customers throw down one, two, three \$10 bills. "Their tolerance goes up." Alice can gross more than \$1,000 a night. That's when things are going well, which they don't always.

A green Range Rover parks halfway down the block. "There's Johnny," Alice says.

A cloud of blue smoke pours out the passenger door, and through it, a young man. He has at least three names. "S.H."—for Superhero—is his legend; people who revere or fear him call him that. Johnny Walker is the street name; Adam is his given name. Only his mother calls him Adam, and a few of his fellow gang members.

As he gets closer, it's clear he's younger than his walk. He's 21 and looks 26; he walks 30. Johnny's black eyes are menacing one moment, child-like the next. "He asked me for a match," Alice near-swoons as she recalls their first meeting. "I thought, 'Ohhh. This boy is beau-ti-ful.'"

"What up, baby?" "Chilling, big man." Johnny nods, schmoozing with his best customers. He's got the celebrity thing down; here in midtown, he is one. As far back as he can remember, he wanted to be like the men in the movies about New York: "When I was a little kid, I used to wander around Little Italy trying to see John Gotti." He wanted to be a gangster, and it happened, too quickly. "It's ridiculous how much faster shit has gotten," says Johnny. "It's like every day is a movie."

"What's the deal?" Johnny asks Alice. "I sold about 30, maybe 35 . . ."

Johnny says he and another guy sold 30 dime bags of coke up at the outdoor jazz festival on 125th Street. Alice calls Johnny her manager, but he's also business partners with her, fifty-fifty. He wooed her away from some other dealers who they both thought were keeping her down. Now they're mad at her. "Because you flipped it, you flipped it," Johnny sometimes reminds her, "and now you're making *more* money . . ."

"Johnny Walker," an old crackhead greets him. Johnny smiles. He loves the attention; he loves the street. What he's addicted to, he says, is the lifestyle.

"Ah-ight. I'll catch you later."

He has, he says, "some other shit to do."

JOHNNY SWINGS THROUGH THE DOOR OF A BRIGHTLY LIT PORN SHOP in Times Square. The Pakistani salesman behind the counter acknowledges him with a grunt. He moves past the racks of videos back to the narrow, dark hall where the booths are for watching movies, a dollar for a couple minutes. Moans waft through the doors. Johnny sits me in a booth and puts a dollar in the machine. He sits in another across from me. The doors

are open; he continues talking. "Write about this," he says. "How people come here, and smoke crack and watch this ill, sick shit . . ."

He tells me, "This is my office."

Most nights, he sits back here, selling crack—concealed under his seat—while Alice works the stoop. He goes out to make his presence known about every hour "to see she don't get robbed."

When I met Johnny a year ago, he was dealing coke strictly. He was the kind of guy certain people knew. He had models, movie actors, photographers, people in the fashion industry as clients. He had an apartment of his own, a cellular phone, "all

that good shit." There were four or five clubs—Expo and Twilo among them—where you'd see him surrounded by girls, drinking whiskey. He dated models and classy strippers, the daughter of a famous fashion designer.

Then he started selling crack. "Mad trials and tribulations," he says.

Our two-minute movies are up.

"SHE GOT GAME," JOHNNY SAYS OF ALICE, walking back to the car. Some of his friends look askance at their association; but Johnny sees her talent. "She got some loose shit. It would take others years to get up to her level."

We climb in the Range Rover. The driver of the rental car has a long, pulpy scar.

We take off, zooming up Tenth Avenue. "Coke never left," says Johnny. "That shit can't be faded. And now people who never did crack before doing crack." He puts a CD on the sound system and chooses a song. Biggie Smalls, "The Ten Crack Commandments."

Number Four: I know you heard this before:

Never get high on your own supply—

Johnny points at the speaker. "That should be No 1. That's why I don't do it. Eat up all your profits. Fuck your shit up . . ."

Johnny's voice is deep and hoarse and mournful.

We're in Washington Heights now, in the 140s, where Johnny has to talk to some people. The Range Rover glides past decaying buildings, through caramel-colored light. There are young mothers with their babies on door stoops, grandmothers fanning them, men leaning against cars, laughing, in the heat. "Up here, crack is live like a wire," Johnny says. "Everybody does it. In every family, at least one, two people. Little kids, 16 years old, selling drugs on the corner, with their father."

We've pulled over on an emptied block. Eight, ten boys, all about 15, jog down the street pumping fists in the air. "Whoop, whoop, whoop!" Johnny gets out; they gather around to meet him as if he were a local athlete. He goes off on an errand, and when he comes back, one of the boys ventures closer, ducking his head.

"Yo, Johnny, where Tito at?"

"I don't know, son."

Johnny slams the door. "Who the fuck is Tito?" he says blandly.

He says he has some other things to take care of back in midtown. We travel south down Broadway past Times Square, where the streets are still alive with people looking for sex, drugs, atmosphere, fast food. "I know people come from ill, dif-

"I know people come from ill, different places. But now they all doing the same thing," Johnny says. "They all smoke crack. I never seen anything so . . . democratic."

ferent places. But now they all doing the same thing," Johnny says. "They all smoke crack. I never seen anything so . . . democratic." He looks out the window. "White people, Hindu people. All races." He's the color of ash. "Everybody forgets about all that . . . shit." Then he turns to the trembling white man in the backseat of the car. He stares him down with something too bored to quite be hatred.

"Right, Chip?"

SOME NIGHTS, JOHNNY WILL ARRANGE FOR A guy like Chip—who is a stockbroker from Long Island—to spend a few hours in a hotel with a hooker and a supply of crack. "I make him buy drugs from me, I get him a girl to amuse him. I'm basically in control of the situation all the time," Johnny says, "but he's paying for it." It's four in the morning. Chip, wearing khaki shorts, a green polo shirt, and white sneakers, is renting a room at a medium-priced midtown hotel.

"This really isn't such a bad place," says Chip, fingering Ray-Bans. His leg is bouncing; there's sweat pouring down his temples. "Actually, I've stayed in worse places." He says he met Johnny through a friend.

"Have you been to Balthazar yet?" he says.

Johnny strolls into the badly lit lobby with a young woman. She has an overbite and is not vivid at this hour. "Rhonda, this is Chip," Johnny says. "Chip has a problem."

Johnny goes off to make a phone call—checking in with Alice. Chip looks after him and laughs nervously. "He's such a cool guy."

The room, on the fourth floor, is simple and stained. Johnny immediately sprawls out on the living-room couch. Chip and Rhonda go to the bedroom with a crack pipe and a handful of drugs.

Johnny flips channels. Tori Spelling is crying.

Johnny's annoyed, thinking about something else. He knows at some point tonight, that guy in the golf shirt's going to try and short poor Rhonda by making her buy some of his crack. "These hookers are just so stupid and so vulnerable, to let these guys beat them out of their money, in their fiend-ness for drugs."

Tori's running across a nicely cut lawn, tears streaming down.

Johnny talks about how relationships with guys like Chip are fleeting. "Eventually, they're gonna become too happy with the situation and think they're gonna be the one to get over. So you have to take precautions." Johnny photographs them smoking crack with their hookers, he means. "Especially with some of these guys who are judges, own advertising agencies. That's how you do it."

Rodney Dangerfield's talking excitedly about his weight loss to *Access Hollywood*. Johnny flips.

Johnny's relationship with Chip is based on a lie that Johnny encouraged, that they were not just dealer and customer but friends. "These guys want to hang out with you, experience the dark side of the force. And they just get so fucked up and tell you so much shit . . ."

"Crack's powerful, yo."

The bedroom door opens. Chip's standing behind it, in boxer shorts. "What up, dude?" he says to Johnny, sleepily.

He wants another hit.

IT'S FOUR IN THE AFTERNOON. A DARK, CRAMPED, MESSY ONE-BEDROOM in the East Seventies. Framed pictures of Michael Jordan line the walls; on a shelf, there's a collection of videos: a lot of Bruce Lee. The apartment belongs to Iz, or Isaac, a 24-year-old trust-fund baby of half-Egyptian extraction. Alice and Johnny have been living with him.

"Do I look like a crackhead?" Iz asks, holding out thick arms. "Hell, no." Iz weighs about 200 pounds; his feathered hair is coated with grease. He's got a crack stem in one hand. His

mouth releases heavy blue smoke. "People think it's a black inner-city fucking thing. It's not."

Iz also deals crack for Johnny, on the Upper East Side, and during the daytime, Johnny uses his house as his office, making moves on the phone. Now Johnny comes into the living room to pick up a cigarette. He sees Iz holding out the pipe, makes like he's shielding his eyes. "I can't be around it," Johnny says.

Iz makes a face.

"What, dick?" Johnny snaps. He's got his shirt off. On his back, there's a tattoo that says RESPECT.

Alice stirs. She's collapsed on the couch, still wearing her purple hat. "Mmm," she says. "I need a wake-up."

Her big hands go straight for the coffee table, where diamonds are strewn like party favors. Eyes barely open, she readies a hit.

On the stereo, Jay-Z raps:

I got extensive hos with expensive clothes

And I sip fine wine—

Johnny's stretched out on the bed like a long, skinny cat, his ribs showing. He's wearing Lycra running pants and a pair of pink shades, slitted frames.

"Yes, make that 'To Mr. Edwards,'" he's saying into the phone, using a different voice—a "white" voice, pedantic. "Congratulations on your tenth anniversary with the firm' . . . And wrap it nice."

The two bottles of Dom Perignon, at \$100 each, will be delivered to Iz's—"Mr. Edwards's"—house, paid for by a stolen corporate Visa. Johnny and Iz got the numbers off receipts in a public trash can. Later, they'll go and resell the champagne for cash to another store.

"You can't knock his hustle," Iz says. "I learned a lotta shit from him already." Johnny's been running schemes since he was about 14, and his knowledge of credit-card scams is apparently encyclopedic. "He's mad creative about it," says Iz.

But somehow, it all doesn't seem to be adding up to much money. Johnny needs the Dom Perignon delivery for the "re-up" money to buy drugs to sell tonight . . . but what happened to last night's proceeds?

Johnny comes back, looking antsy. "Let's eat," he says.

"I want two pepperoni, extra cheese, flooded, I want that shit flooded," he's telling the pizza girl on the phone.

"Tell 'em don't forget the hot wings, medium," Alice nags, standing unsteadily. "I don't even want them hot 'cause they make them off the hook—"

"All right, Miss Bitch," Johnny says. He orders the wings and gives out another stolen credit-card number.

Alice ties her wig hair up in a bun; she flexes her pronounced arm muscles. She's wearing a flowered halter top. Johnny regards her with a grin.

"You a big girl," he says.

"Ain't nothing wrong with a big girl," says Alice.

"I can fuck you up, though."

"Whatever, brother."

They laugh.

They've grown close ever since the night, several months ago, when Johnny knocked on her hotel-room door, drenched with rain and sick with flu. "When nobody else would take me in, she took me in," he says. "Even my own mother won't let me in my house."

"Yo," he says, directing the black eyes on me. "Tell these people how my mother is."

"I don't want to say anything about your mother," I say.

But Johnny's insistent. "I want to hear this shit on tape," he says. "You gotta say it, for the real. How does my mother help the problem?"

A few times, Johnny has called me from his mother's house; he breaks in occasionally to get clothes or shoes. Always in the background is her voice: "You're a pig!" "You look horrible!"

"I'd say"—I grope unsuccessfully for something that won't sound clichéd—"she's abusive."

"Extremely abusive," Johnny says, looking around at all of us. Iz is interested. "Verbally, physically?"

"You stupid?" says Johnny. "Put it like this—when I was a little kid, my mother used to beat the shit out of me every day. She used to beat me like a bitch. With a motherfucking spear from Coney Island, that's what it was."

Johnny takes a small glass vial from the coffee table, taps some coke into it, then some baking soda. "My mother hates black people," he says, lowering his voice.

He drips water from a drinking glass into the vial. He holds a lighter flame to it, swishing around the mixture. The vial gets too hot to hold and he picks it up with a clipper; he continues swishing, watching. His eyes are lit by the flame, transfixed.

"It's chemistry. A solid to a liquid to a solid," says Iz.

Johnny takes the big red bong with the skull and crossbones on it from the center of the coffee table; he stuffs the bowl with the hit of crack he's just cooked. He seems to have forgotten he's told me he doesn't smoke crack.

His body goes tense, then relaxed, as he sucks in an enormous hit.

A crack high isn't speedy but mellow, a numbness. "You could be on the motherfucking table having heart surgery and not feel a thing," Johnny says.

JOHNNY'S TALKING ANCIENT HISTORY. I'VE HEARD THE stories from others, but never from him. About how he started the gang when he was 15, and how for years they ran a certain part of the city. "Until Giuliani. Motherfucker's doing his job, straight up. Just makes my job harder." Johnny was "the intelligence" of the operation. But he was always wild: "I had no self-discipline." He can't count anymore how many times he's been arrested—for armed robbery, assault, possession, drug trafficking, even counterfeiting. He did almost two years at Rikers. "That's going through hell. That's when you go from a person to an animal, sheisty"—dishonest—"scheme-on-your-mother, every-man-for-himself. Rikers Island don't rehabilitate you."

When he was 17, he ran away. Moved to Florida; did his first line of coke and started selling—"just so I could use for free." And went on a spree of robbing other dealers, including some neo-Nazi skinheads whom he and another guy—"May he rest in peace"—held at bay with Mossberg shotguns. "You know how I do. If you are a drug dealer, I will rob you," Johnny says. He laughs.

"I was living in West Palm with a 30-year-old woman, driving her car, crashing her car, living in her fucking apartment complex."

His voice is soft. "It was life, it was on. It was innocent fun."

ONE NIGHT, WANDERING AROUND TIMES SQUARE, JOHNNY'S MUTTERING to himself, "It's all about the Benjamins, baby . . . I gotta make some cream." And then, all the way across Eighth Avenue, he spots the boy from Virginia Beach.

Johnny doesn't know the boy's from Virginia Beach yet; or that he's traveling around this summer in a rental car, trying to have adventures; or that he has \$800 in his bank account. He just knows.

As we're passing the boy and his friend, in the middle of the street, Johnny turns to me. "I told you," he says, "no more nothing on the arm!" That is, no more coke on credit (he's acting here). He yells at me, "You know I got the best shit there is, and I got to make my cream—"

The boy from Virginia Beach can hear him now. "Yo, dude!" Johnny commands. The boy turns around. "Yeah?" he says.

Johnny barks, "You looking for something?"

"Way-yal," says the boy. He's a sunburned Gomer Pyle in Texas. He's a little bit Deadhead, very drunk. "Whatcha got?"

the boy says. We start walking. He's already following Johnny, at his side.

Johnny's telling him about his coke. "It's the bomb, the bomb. You could blow up the World Trade Center with this shit—"

The boy from Virginia Beach laughs. "I sell a little coke myself down in Virginia Beach, where I'm from?" he says. "Don't make a whole lot, but enough to get me from there all the way to Maine and then back down here!"

Johnny smiles. Sure. "That's cool, man, that's cool."

The boy's friend—another boy, ferret-faced, more nervous—whispers something. "Uh, but how do I know the shit's really good?" the boy from Virginia Beach says.

Johnny shrugs, now businesslike: "I'll give you a bump. We'll go in the diner over there. You can take a line in the bathroom."

Johnny stands on the street, waiting, silent, as the boy goes inside the diner. A few minutes later, he's coming out, sniffing hard. "God-damn! Who! You don't lie!"

A few minutes later, we're standing outside a cash machine.

As the boy's ATM card slides into the slot, Johnny turns around slowly and gives me a look: "Done."

"Thanks, man," says the boy, handing Johnny five twenties. He shambles around; he doesn't seem to want to leave. "Uh, you and your friend wouldn't want to come out with us, would you?"

"Nah, I'm kinda busy," Johnny says.

Like the best magic tricks, the best cons are simple. The boy walks away with a vial of baking soda.

"Let him go away and become a lawyer," Johnny says, "like he's destined to be." His mouth turned down, he counts his money, pockets it.

"New York, New York, baby. Trust no one."

AT THE CLUB EXPO IN MIDTOWN ON SUNDAY nights, the party's called Café con Leche. Johnny's passing by; he hasn't been there in about a year. He used to do the club scene, "have my little calendar and all that shit." He stands outside the police barricades now, his arms folded, watching all the people in line. He looks slightly amazed at something. "This was *my* club," he says.

"I got so fucking sick of being the cool guy."

We keep walking, west on 42nd. "You know I went to motherfucking private school?" Johnny squints. "When I got kicked out, all I ever wanted to be was what I am now. And now I'm just so fucking a hundred times intensified of what I wanted to be that I don't even *remember* wanting to be this . . . I can't imagine wanting to be this."

Back at the stoop, Johnny says, "Hey, Alice," sitting down next to his partner. She's already pulling a diamond out of her pocket. Johnny leans against the door and pulls his leg up over his face.

He grumbles, "Let me get a hit."

ONE DAY, JOHNNY'S MOTHER CALLS ME ON THE PHONE.

"He thinks he's from the ghetto, he's not from the ghetto," she rambles, near hysterical. She's recently had him arrested for being in her apartment. She's been driving around nights with one of his gang brothers, looking for him.

"What"—she's almost screaming—"is he doing out there?!"

ONE-THIRTY IN THE MORNING A WEEK LATER, AT IZ'S. JOHNNY'S SITTING in the leather chair, explaining the heist. He's been talking about how he wants out of the game; but first, he has to make some money. Some real money. "Then I'm gonna get all my shit down by a lasso," he says.

A young man, about 23, with a shaved head, crouches beside him. He looks confused. Johnny's drawing a diagram for him on the ripped back of a pizza box. "Kenny, this is the building, this is

Certain names and identifying details have been changed.

the apartment. There's crack in there. And we're going to rob it." Kenny is one of his boys from the gang, "my animal thug," Johnny says. He can still get them to show up when he needs them, "due to my popeliness," he laughs. And they're always interested in his ideas for making money. One of them tells me, "He used to think up *everything* for us to do."

He tells them he's not smoking. "You know I stopped all that shit." Kenny and Raf, the other gang member who's been summoned, look back and forth now with pained expressions, as if they're wondering how they're going to get away with this.

Johnny wants to rob a major crack house in Washington Heights. It's run by Dominican mafia, "niggas who would kill you."

He strides up and down the living room, going over his plan, heavy-metal music blaring. Johnny likes heavy metal. A hard guitar riff comes on; he plays it back. "This is what plays when I walk in a room," he says.

He's been smoking all day, but Kenny and Raf don't know it. He's pumped; he expects the robbery will yield fifteen ounces. "Fifteen ounces. At 28 grams an ounce, and \$50 a gram—that's over \$20,000! Yo, it's so simple—"

His plan is rather ingenious, and crazy, and everybody sits back thinking about it. "I—I don't want to talk about it no more," Kenny says uncomfortably. "Let's just do it."

"Ah-ight," Johnny says happily. "Let's do it."

He pulls on a dark shirt—heist clothes—over his naked torso.

"What you weigh now?" Kenny asks, eyeing him suspiciously.

"A buck sixty-five, why?" Johnny says.

"You always been bigger than me," says Kenny, accusing. "You should be like a buck seventy-seven."

It irritates Johnny. "What, now this nigga think he a nutritionist?"

ALICE AND I GO UPTOWN IN A CAB. JOHNNY, Raf, and Kenny follow in a rented Range Rover. I look back; Johnny's waving a cigarette, laughing. Alice is asleep beside me, her head slapping back against the seat.

In Washington Heights, the cars slow down. Crackheads mill on the street, sag in doorways, smoking. "Hmm? What? We ready?" Alice says.

We get out a few blocks away from the crack spot. The Range Rover parks. Johnny motions from the window. "You'll be all right with her," he whispers to me.

The street is quiet but for Alice's stiletto heels clicking on the sidewalk. We're passing by an abandoned building. Alice murmurs, "Look, over there, that's where Johnny used to live." I glance in the window: twisted metal, old boards, darkness. Up and down the block, you can see the lookouts: young Dominicans smoking cigarettes, leaning on doors.

The stoop of the building is teeming with addicts. One of them reaches for Alice's behind as we climb up the stairs. "That ain't nothing for you!" she says, slapping.

The addicts drape the hallways, blinking in the half-light. There's a line in the selling room: thin, exhausted men waiting

for their turn at a podium. Behind the podium, a Dominican weighs out coke on a scale. He wraps it in tinfoil. *Next*. "Let me get a half a gram," Alice says boredly, adjusting her sunglasses.

She does some of her "loose shit" that Johnny so admires, mincing back and forth. "Y'all got a stem?"

The Dominicans are mildly amused, but busy; they ignore her. "I think," she murmurs, "the last time I was here I done left something in the kitchen . . ."

They don't know it, but, alone in there, Alice is unlocking the window.

Back on the street, she's gleeful, cackling. "Oh, that was *too easy*."

We walk quickly. Alice signals to the Range Rover. Johnny and Kenny jump out and disappear into the darkness.

From a pay phone on the corner, Alice calls the police. She makes her voice sound urgent: ". . . yes, and they got him tied up in there, and they're hitting him and beating him—" She gives the address of the crack spot.

The plan is: When the police drive up, the lookouts will notify the sellers, who will flee the selling room. Kenny will dash in from the fire escape—through the unlocked window—and toss everything behind the podium into a backpack. He'll throw it out the window to Johnny, who'll be waiting on the ground. "Like taking candy from a *baby*," Alice says.

BACK IN THE CAR, RAF IS SMOKING A CIGARETTE. Nas is playing:

If I ruled the world

I'd free all my sons—

We spend a few minutes, tense, without speaking. We can hear police sirens, a lot of them. I imagine Johnny looking up, waiting for all that crack to fall from the sky . . . I remember him saying, "What the fuck am I doing, risking my life for this shit? . . . But I can't help it."

Kenny appears, opening the door slowly. His shirt is off; rivulets of sweat pour down his face and neck.

The backpack is empty.

"What the fuck?" Raf says.

"I—I don't know," Kenny says.

Johnny climbs in the Range Rover and slams the door. "Be out, be out, be out!" he yells.

The car screeches off at high speed. "You fucking idiot, Kenny!"

ALL THE WAY BACK DOWNTOWN, JOHNNY YELLS: "I HAD TO ABORT, to save this nigga's ass, this nigga who just beat me out of \$20,000, a gold mine just sitting there, waiting for us!" Kenny couldn't find the right apartment, so he ran up and down the fire escape, searching, until it was too late. "He runs up and down like a fucking animal in a cage," says Johnny. "What was you doing all the way up on the fifth floor, Kenny?! Why don't you go for the light! All the other apartments was dark! I'ma get you a motherfucking handicapped parking place!"

"AAAAGGGGGHHHHH!"

"I feel like crying right now," Johnny says.

BACK AT IZ'S, EVERYBODY'S SITTING THERE, NUMB. JOHNNY AND Kenny are faced off in the middle of the room. Johnny continues his tirade: "It's because you weren't *listening*. Kenny, what'd I say to you, beginning of the night?" (continued on page 75)

I imagine Johnny looking up, waiting for all that crack to fall from the sky. Once, he said, "What the fuck am I doing, risking my life for this shit? But I can't help it."

in concert

Dance at Den of Thieves...Red Squalls II



Classical Music

Thursday, August 28

Brahms on Broadway—A recital of folk songs by the Viennese classicist. Trinity Church, 74 Trinity Pl., at Broadway (602-0873), at 1 P.M.; free.

Bun-Ching Lam—Performs Eastern and Western chamber music. North Plaza, Lincoln Center (721-6500), at 6:30; free.

Bargemusic—Works by Mozart and Dvorák, performed by Wendy Chen, piano, Nai-Yuan Hu, violin, and Ronald Thomas, cello. Fulton Ferry Landing, under the Brooklyn Bridge, Brooklyn (718-624-4061), at 6:30; \$125, with candlelit dinner.

Friday, August 29

Summergarden—Rudhyar, Lockwood, Mimaroglu, and Musgrave, performed by Albert Tiu, piano, David Gresham, clarinet, and Tom Chiu, violin. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden, Museum of Modern Art, 14 W. 54th St. (708-9400), at 8:30; free.

Seven Concerts and a Painted Orchestra—Tomas Bachli, piano, performs works by Debussy, Linder, and Wolff amid paintings of naked musicians. LaMama Theater, 6 E. 1st St. (475-7710), at 9; \$5.

Bargemusic—Mozart, Kodaly, and Dvorák performed by Nelson Padgett, piano, and Nai-Yuan Hu, violin. Fulton Ferry Landing, under the Brooklyn Bridge, Brooklyn (718-624-4061), at 7:30; \$15-\$23.

Saturday, August 30

Seven Concerts and a Painted Orchestra—Piano duo Paul Marquardt and Drew Krause perform their works, and Margaret Lancaster, flute, performs Stockhausen, amid paintings of naked musicians.

Ground Rules:

This section emphasizes classical concerts, recitals, and public square/park performances (but only the premeditated ones), and includes the occasional jazz concert if it is held, say, outdoors or in a public space. For rock concerts and club information, see "Nightlife."

Previews All That Jive

Riverdancers, scissor-step aside. The latest cultural dance fusion has arrived with the "Jiving Lindy Hoppers," a troupe that combines jazz tap dancing and Irish step, with musical accompaniment ranging from jazz musicians to Indian tabla drummers. Lincoln Center Out of Doors, August 28 and 29.

LaMama Theater, 6 E. 1st St. (475-7710), at 9; \$5.

Bargemusic—See 8/28, at 4.

Summergarden—See 8/29.

Dance

Forever Tango—The Argentine form interpreted by Luis Bravo. Walter Kerr Theater, 218 W. 48th St. (239-6200); \$30-\$65.

Dancing on the Plaza—Red Squalls II, choreographed by Gus Solomons Jr., performs 8/27 at 5:30, and Rennie Harris PureMovement performs 8/29 at 5:30. Fountain Plaza, Lincoln Center (721-6500); free.

forward...—Avant-garde choreographer and dancer Eric Dunlap and designer Holly Dagers perform their newest work in conjunction with a Swiss film and techno DJ., 8/30 beginning at 9. Den of Thieves, 145 E. Houston St. (252-4033); free.

Jiving Lindy Hoppers—Perform Afro-Celtic dance with SIN E and Diane Walker, 8/28 and 8/29 at 8:15. Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center (721-6500); free.

Brazilfest '97—On 8/30, electric samba with Juliana Aquino at 4, Fountain Plaza; Rio Samba lessons at 5:30, North Plaza; samba and gospel music and dance, with Sandra De Sá and the Mount Moriah Gospel Choir at 8:15, Damrosch Park Bandshell. Lincoln Center (721-6500), all day; free.

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Kenny's taken this for half an hour, and he finally explodes. "I ain't listening to nothing you say to me, Adam."

"You better learn from me," says Johnny. "I'm like fucking Channel 13 to you. You turn on that shit and you see my face—"

Kenny's had enough. He swipes his foot across the coffee table, kicking diamonds on the carpet. "Let me find out you still doing this shit!"

"Shut up, man," says Johnny.

"I fuck you up!" Kenny says. "But I would fuck you up every single day and you still wouldn't be looking as bad as you be looking right now!"

Johnny stares at him a moment, and then he sits down in the leather chair. "Yo, I'm sleeping in my bed," he says, in disbelief, "and this nigga and all them came and beat the shit out of me, held me hostage. My mother let them in my house 'cause they found out I was smoking."

Kenny frowns. "It had to be right, man." A few months ago, some of the boys in the gang "kidnapped" Johnny and took him to a rehab, out of state. But he escaped.

Now Johnny gets angry. "I'll do whatever I want to do. That's why I don't rock with y'all niggas no more. Like if y'all think you could do that to me... What you think I am, some white boy?"

Kenny shakes his head. "You're different, man. I don't like to see you like this—in this crummy-ass place, with these stupid-ass whores."

Alice and I exchange a look.

No one moves. Johnny stands up. "Don't get me mad, man."

"Give me your word," says Kenny.

Johnny yells, "Give me fifteen ounces of crack!"

Kenny clicks his tongue. "Get me up out of this jungle hole."

JOHNNY SMOKES ALONE LATER THAT NIGHT; he goes uptown to cop, or buy from a dealer, something he says he never does. He can't wait to take it home, so he sits on an abandoned metal chair on the sidewalk. You can hear the crack bubbling, slurping as he takes a hit. "It's just, it runs through your mind," he says, "like... when you can't stop thinking about someone you want to get with."

He says, "I want my father to check me into rehab... I want to go to church." He has some jail time hanging over his head. "I want to do my bid, stop it right there, cold turkey." He stares off in the distance. "Seeing someone so addicted to something, I guess you lose respect."

Johnny tosses his crack stem in the street. "I'll catch you later." He gets up and walks down 113th Street alone.