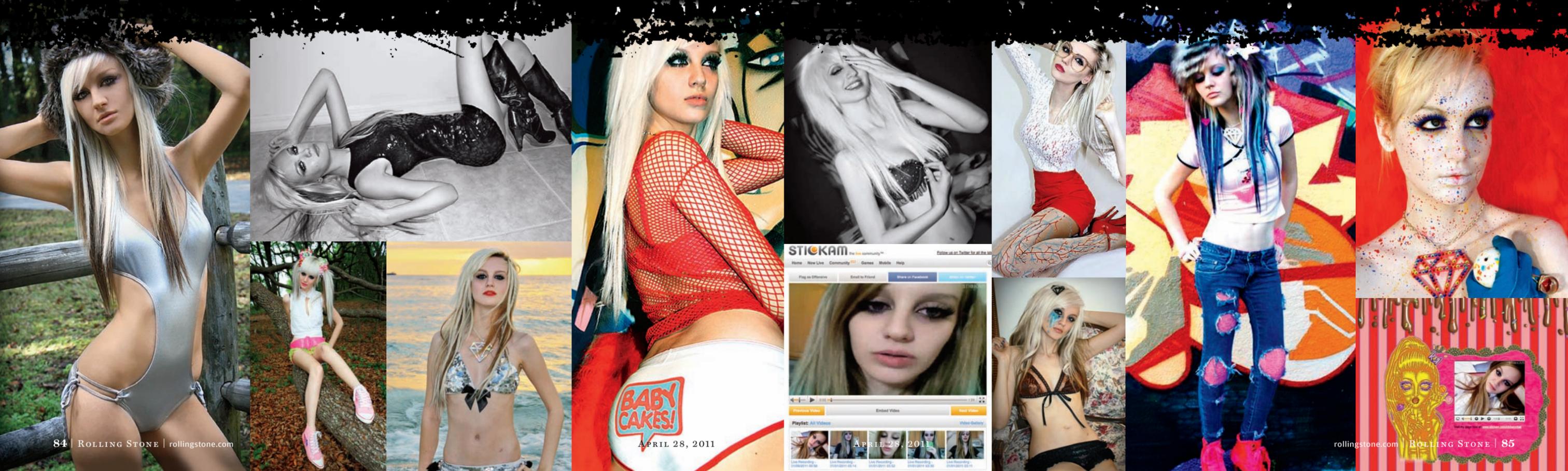


# THE GIRL WHO PLAYED WITH FIRE

It started online and quickly grew into the most intimate of a teenage Internet celebrity who discovered that the

betrayals. The rise, fall and stubborn survival of Kiki Kannibal, real world can be a very scary place *By Sabrina Rubin Erdely*



**T**HE FIRST THING KIKI OSTRENGA SAW AS SHE ran out the front door of her family's white ranch house were the neon-green words spray-painted across the front path: "Regal Slut." She stopped short. Maybe this is just a dream, she thought. The 14-year-old took a few fearful steps forward. She gasped when she reached the driveway. Her parents' home was splattered with ketchup, chocolate syrup and eggs. And across the garage door, big as a billboard, was scrawled the word "SLUT." † "Oh, my God," Kiki whispered. Her mother and 11-year-old sister stepped outside, and their faces froze in horror. That's when Kiki burst into sobs. This was more than she could handle. For the past year, she had endured the hateful blogs and e-mails, the threats and prank calls, the late-night drive-bys with teenagers screaming her name out of car windows. Just this week, at an all-ages punk show, a pack of girls had recognized Kiki in the audience and jumped her,

cramming gum into her bleached-blond hair. But this vandalism of her home was a different level of harassment.

A year earlier, Kirsten "Kiki" Ostrenga was just another tween nobody living her so-called life in Coral Springs, Florida. Then she got a MySpace account, and everything changed. A stylish wisp of a girl who adored punky "scene kid" fashion, Kiki began filling her MySpace page with pouty photos of herself in heavy makeup and cropped tops, adopting a persona as brash and outrageous as the real Kirsten

house, where her father stood before the graffiti-ridden garage, raising one hand in a cheerless goodbye. She wondered if this would go down as the strangest day of her young life.

Not by a long shot. Kiki was hurtling into a twisted online realm, populated not just with trash-talking teens but also with stalkers, hackers, predators and profiteers. She didn't realize the Web can be a portal for people's cruelest impulses, or that it allows those forces to assemble into a mob. She didn't know that her life was about to

**ONE THREAT READ: "I KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE AND I'M GONNA KILL YOUR CAT." SOON AFTER, KIKI'S CAT VANISHED.**

was awkward and insecure. She named her creation "Kiki Kannibal," and her new and improved online self swiftly became an Internet celebrity. But fame had come with a backlash she could never have anticipated.

Still crying, Kiki clambered into the family car. Despite that morning's shock, she had to run: She was late for the first of two appointments, which summed up her life. The first was a modeling gig at a local hair salon, for which Kiki was dolled up in a pink tube top, skinny jeans and heels, her makeup now a tragic ruin. Her second appointment was with a sex-crimes detective, investigating a pedophile who had sought her out online and taken advantage of her.

As her mom backed the car out of the driveway, Kiki took one last look at their

SABRINA RUBIN ERDELY *wrote* "Hackers Gone Wild" in RS 1106.

become an extreme parable about connection and celebrity in the digital age – that the next four years would be fraught with danger, threats to her family, and a violent death. She had yet to understand what a lot of us don't comprehend: that our virtual lives can take on their own momentum, rippling outward with real-life consequences we can neither predict nor control.

**T**HERE ARE 530 FACEBOOK profiles claiming to be Kiki Kannibal, including one with just over 20,000 fans, and none of them are hers. Some are obvious fakes, like "Kiki Dorkface Kannibal," but others are hard to detect. "I met a guy who said, 'I talked to a fake of yours online for two years, and I thought I was talking to you!'" says Kiki, now 18. In person, she's striking – with angular cheek-

bones, plump lips and enormous almond-shaped blue eyes, which she enhances with superhuman size with false lashes and liquid liner. If you're among those who have logged more than 2 million views on Kiki's live-video stream on Stickam.com, you've encountered those eyes, gazing out of your computer, creating an unnervingly intimate connection while Kiki, the epitome of modern oversharing, blathers on about her favorite song, her menstrual cycle or whatever stray thought noodles through her mind. And Kiki's public has responded in kind, expressing both its love and loathing without boundaries. This past Christmas, one fan wrote to ask if she could crash with Kiki: "So I could breathe and reboot." Days later, Kiki got a different request: "So if I wanted to send you a homemade bomb that will explode and kill you when you open it, where would I send it to?"

Photograph by DANIELLE LEVITT



**KIKI'S REAL WORLD**  
Kirsten Ostrenga  
at home in Florida

Five years in, the cyberstalking nightmare shows no signs of stopping, and threat assessment has become the backdrop of Kiki's life. She doesn't take any of it lightly, especially since the message she got last spring: "I know where you live and I'm gonna kill your fucking cat." Soon afterward, her cat Sebastian disappeared.

"It's scary," says Kiki, her words muffled by her braces. Seated at a cafe near her current home outside Orlando – she prefers I don't reveal the precise location – she's stick-thin in a black minidress, a heavy quartz-skull necklace and a skull ring; despite her tough-girl accessories, she comes across as tentative and frail, hugging her studded purse for comfort. "I never thought I would run into these types of people," she says. "But on the Internet, you're exposed to people that will do anything."

Fame wasn't Kiki's intention when she first logged on in 2006. She was just a lonely 13-year-old whose days at Sawgrass Springs Middle School had become a bullying hell. Her family had transplanted from the Chicago suburb of Streamwood for dad Scott's computer-engineering job. The Ostrengas and their three kids – Kyler, Kirsten and Dakota – were lured by promises of palm trees and sunshine. "I had this idea of Florida as this paradise," says mom Cathy, a forthright Midwesterner. Cathy was 18 when she met Scott; he was fronting a rock band with big dreams; she was putting herself through college, her sights set on law school. Instead, they married young, Cathy became a housewife, and Scott wound up in middle management. Moving to Florida was supposed to be an exciting jolt to their lives. "We thought it would be fun," says Cathy.

But from the day she started sixth grade at Sawgrass, Kiki had a hard time fitting in, especially with the Hispanic and black girls who dominated her classroom. "I was bullied constantly," Kiki recalls. "They would call me a white ho and a white bitch." Her parents complained to the school but were disappointed by what they saw as a lack of response.

Kiki fought back by embracing her outsider status, chopping her long hair and dyeing it pink. She remade herself into a "scene queen," a teen trend that uses as its baseline the snarl of goth – thick makeup, piercings, fishnets – and brightens it with the cutesy uplift of hair bows, vivid Eighties colors and lots of Hello Kitty. The effect is a hodgepodge of the grown-up and the infantile: adolescence visualized. But Kiki's new look made her even more of a freak at school, and her tormentors' words

turned to punches. Exasperated by the school – and by schools in general, having tried various options for their autistic son – her parents withdrew Kiki after seventh grade to home-school her with her older brother.

The Ostrengas urged Kiki to view it as a chance at a more stimulating life path than their own. Pointing out her creativity, her eye for fashion and how much she enjoyed making her own jewelry, they laid out a plan. When Kiki was ready, she'd take the high school equivalency exam and enroll in college courses. (Kiki would accomplish this by age 15.) Meanwhile, she would launch her own company to make and sell jewelry, and learn real-life business skills.

The plan seemed OK to Kiki. But she was stuck at home and at a loss as to how to meet new friends. She wanted to reach out to the world beyond Coral Springs and find misfits like herself. So, with her parents' permission, she joined MySpace.

Calling herself "Kiki Kannibal," she began posting pictures of herself, highlighting her hairdo of the moment: a mullet that she'd layered, bleached and fluffed – think Ziggy Stardust – and then dyed with dark horizontal stripes. Between her hair's artificiality and her androgynous slimness, she projected a confident kind of cool. Her friend count on MySpace quickly boomed. She was excited by her new popularity. Each time she logged on, more friend requests were waiting: first a handful, then dozens, then 25,000 within three months. Flattered, Kiki accepted everyone. "It was kinda like a video game," Kiki says. "I didn't see it as real people, more like as a number."

She soon discovered that not all of her new "friends" were all that friendly. She found a MySpace page where other kids were discussing her awful hair, her anorexic thinness, her vanity. "Let's start a I hate Kiki club 'cause she's ugly!" proposed one girl. "I obsess over hating her it's hella fun," exhorted another. Each time Kiki logged on, she found her page spammed with messages from teens. "You're a skank!" "Kiki go die you ugly fucker!"

Kiki was horrified. From the safety of her computer, she lashed out, calling her attackers "nasty low-lives" and "sub-humans." A 17-year-old, who claimed she lived near Kiki's hometown, responded with a chilling post: "I will fuckin' beat the living shit out of you. Go ahead and call the cops, see what they do. My father was a cop in this city and I can get away with murder if I wanted to." Another teenage girl threatened to "curb stomp her *American History X* style." A girl from Pittsburgh posted Kiki's real name, and another in Miami posted her phone number. One day Kiki logged on to discover this message: "I'll fucking murder you little girl."

Terrified, the Ostrengas held a kitchen-table meeting. They had complained to MySpace, which deleted harassers' profiles, but the kids simply created new ones and resumed their torment. The police told the Ostrengas they could do nothing given the harassers' anonymity. Cathy and Scott suggested to Kiki that it was time to leave MySpace, but Kiki protested: "If you take me off the Internet, the bullies will win." Pushed out of school, she was determined not to back down again. Her parents thought a teachable moment might be presenting itself: Maybe if they stood their ground, justice would prevail. So they let Kiki stay online, telling themselves it would blow over, like all teenage dramas do.

Kiki didn't tell them the other reason she didn't want to leave MySpace. She had finally made a connection that she hoped would last, but one that had set off a new, even more unsettling strain of hate mail: "No one compliments you except



**AGE OF INNOCENCE**  
Kirsten "Kiki" Ostrenga in fourth grade, in Illinois. When her family moved to Florida, Kiki's troubles began.

your rapist 18-year-old boyfriend." "Rape-enjoying pathetic bitch." "Your fucking 13 year old, and mr pedifile, I mean mr myspace, should go to jail for dating you. SLUTTTTT!"

Because amid all the spite, there was a boy in Kiki's life. Well, not exactly a boy.

**H**IS NAME WAS DANNY CESPEDES. Online he was "Mr. MySpace," with the slogan "Come play with me and Hello Kitty." He told Kiki he was 17, but he was really 18. Danny had jet-black hair, snakebite piercings through his lower lip and a bat tattoo below his navel, just like Fall Out Boy's Pete Wentz. He and Kiki began chatting online. He made her feel like someone out there liked her,

and when Danny asked to meet – he lived near Miami – she agreed to a rendezvous at a Coral Springs mall. They met on Kiki's 14th birthday, in September 2006, with Kiki's mom in tow, even though Danny had assured Cathy by phone, "I just want to be friends with your daughter." He presented Kiki with a crystal Hello Kitty necklace.

Cathy was wary but found herself impressed by how polite Danny was, how he never failed to call her "Mrs. Ostrenga" and made lots of eye contact. When he visited the Ostrenga home soon afterward, he engaged each family member – even Kiki's autistic big brother, warming Cathy's heart. He brought over his collection of Power Rangers action figures for Kiki to keep. "He made himself out to be an open, honest kind of guy. Harmless," says Cathy. So she allowed the pair to go on unchaperoned outings, which turned into makeout sessions in Danny's car.

Kiki was delighted to have acquired her first boyfriend. Their romance blossomed under the scrutiny of a vast online audience, which kept a sharp eye out for whenever the pair posted notes on each other's pages. But it was a different story in real life, where Danny was moving too fast, and Kiki nervously told him she didn't want to have sex.

"Shake on it?" Kiki demanded, and they solemnly shook hands.

The deal didn't last long. One night in November, Danny was at the Ostrengas' when he started acting strangely, staggering around as though in a dizzy fog. "He was really off, he was drunk or something, and he passed out," says Kiki. Her parents, unsure of what to do, decided to let him sleep it off on the couch. In the middle of the night, Danny crawled into Kiki's bed. "Baby, do you love me?" he asked, reaching into her underwear. Kiki squirmed away.

She did love him, but she didn't want to sleep with him. And yet, no matter how many times Kiki told him "No" – at least 10 times, by her count – Danny persisted. The more he groped and pressured her, the more juvenile Kiki felt for denying him. She was tired of fighting him off, and she could see he wasn't going to take no for an answer. The moment Kiki stopped resisting, Danny forced himself on her.

Afterward, Danny was tender, whispering to her in Spanish – Kiki didn't understand a word – and telling her how much he loved her. He also warned her not to tell her parents, saying, "If your mom found out, we wouldn't be together." Kiki was awash in shame; she felt betrayed and deeply violated by what Danny had just done to her. At the same time, she didn't want to lose him. So she kept quiet and continued dating him, including submitting to sex. "It was always, 'If you don't do this, you don't love me,'" Kiki recalls,

breaking down in tears. "I kind of pretend like it never happened."

By this time, it was dawning on Kiki's parents that something wasn't right about Danny. One clue was when he showed up with a batch of new tattoos: Kiki's face on his shoulder, KIKI across his stomach, and on his ankle, a Hello Kitty holding a balloon with the name "Kirsten." The Ostrengas were alarmed, but Cathy had heard enough about Danny's chaotic home life to make her feel sorry for him. She knew that his 29-year-old sister, Rosa, had been convicted of armed robbery and had just emerged from prison after eight years. Danny had also recounted how at age four he had seen his father chase his mom with a gun. He told them his dad was no longer in his life. What Danny didn't say was why his father had left: He'd been deported to his native Peru after being convicted of sexual battery of a minor. The child had been under the age of 12.

"I felt bad for Danny," says Cathy. So she let him stick around, reassuring herself that it wouldn't be for long, since Danny had told them that he and his mom planned to move to North Carolina soon.

**"I'M GOING TO BE BLUNT WITH YOU," THE DETECTIVE TOLD KIKI'S MOTHER. "IF SOMEONE WANTS TO KILL YOU, THEY ARE PROBABLY GOING TO SUCCEED."**

Anyway, he seemed to make Kiki happy.

Danny's family didn't like his hanging out with Kiki. He would often return home wearing Kiki-applied eyeliner, nail polish and hair highlights, upsetting his mother. Lourdes Cespedes would call Cathy and scream, "He looks like a fucking faggot!" She insisted that the two kids stop seeing each other. But Danny kept coming back, telling the Ostrengas through tears that he couldn't spend another minute living with his mother. Cathy and Scott decided he had worn out his welcome but couldn't seem to figure out how to kick him out. When they asked him to leave, he'd throw tantrums and cry. Then one night his ex-con sister, Rosa, called the house, furious that Danny was there despite their mother's orders to stay away. "You and your daughter, you ain't gonna be around no more!" she threatened Cathy. (Through their attorney, both Lourdes and Rosa declined to comment.) The Ostrengas called the police, but the cops did nothing. "If she shows up at your house," they said, "call us."

Tired of the drama, Kiki was beginning to agree with her parents: It was time to break up with Danny. She met him in her driveway and gave him back his Power

Rangers. Danny, crying hysterically, responded by pulling out a handful of pills: Excedrin, weight-loss pills, painkillers. "Danny, don't do that!" Kiki screamed as he swallowed them all, roughly pushed her away and sped off in his car. Sobbing, Kiki ran inside to call the police. Danny survived the suicide attempt – he was hospitalized nearby – but Kiki was too scared to break up with him again and continued seeing him behind her parents' back. "I felt so responsible," Kiki says. "If he died, I didn't want that on my shoulders." At the same time, she was flattered at being wanted so much, at being so demonstrably loved. But a month after Danny told Kiki they'd be together forever, he moved to North Carolina. Soon after, she received a message on MySpace alerting her that Danny, now a few weeks shy of his 19th birthday, was dating a 14-year-old.

Kiki was crushed, but the worst was yet to come. Over the next few weeks, she received e-mails from a string of girls, ages 13 to 15, telling her that Danny had seduced and then swiftly dumped them, too. Kiki looked at one girl's MySpace page and found a comment from Danny: "You have

really soft lips hehehehe."

Ultimately, Kiki says, she discovered that she had been the fourth of 18 young girls Danny had pursued, including a 12-year-old; he usually sought them out via MySpace, just as he'd found Kiki. "That's when I realized: That's what he does," she recalls. "I felt used."

Kiki stopped eating and taking care of herself. She dwindled down to a skeletal 72 pounds. Cathy sensed something was seriously wrong with her daughter. "What is it?" she asked. "Did he do anything to you?" Kiki didn't answer. "Did you have sex with him?" Cathy persisted.

Tears streamed down Kiki's face. "Yes," she whispered.

The Ostrengas called the police. The investigation took Kiki off-guard: a series of graphic interviews; a pelvic exam in which a doctor searched for remnants of her hymen; meetings with a victim's advocate, who told her parents, "If she doesn't get counseling, she's either going to become more promiscuous or she's going to hate guys." Kiki tried to stay calm. She sought refuge in the online life she had created. But her two worlds had veered into each other and were now spinning way

beyond her control. The investigation into her rape was unfolding amid the nonstop noise of her growing fan base and intensifying backlash. Because while Kirsten Ostrenga's life was falling apart, Kiki Kannibal continued posting as though nothing had happened. Buzznet, a popular online community, had approached Kiki to blog about pop-culture trends, expanding her Internet fame. The online death threats were still swirling. The Web was filling up with fake Kiki Kannibal profiles, mostly malicious ones, but some calling themselves "role players": imitators who saw Kiki as a style icon, posing as her in tribute. It was very confusing. At a show of the metalcore band the Devil Wears Prada, Kiki was swarmed by guys in their twenties who pleaded to take her photo – but as the camera clicked, one man punched her in the head. And then the Ostrenga house was vandalized, waking the family up to how vulnerable they had become.

Two weeks after the vandalism, Cathy Ostrenga was folding laundry when Rosa's words from months earlier rang in her head. *You ain't gonna be around no more.* Cathy's mind raced. How would Rosa react

once Danny was arrested for Kiki's rape? For that matter, how far would any of Kiki's stalkers go to hurt the family?

Days later, the Ostrengas packed up and moved, leaving their house an empty shell. "I asked the detective, 'Are we going to end up being killed?'" Cathy recalls. "And he told me, 'I'm going to be blunt with you. If somebody wants to kill you, they're probably going to succeed.'"

**K**IKI UNPLUGGED FROM the Internet for three weeks while the Ostrengas settled in at her grandmother's house near Orlando, three hours north of Coral Springs. Insulated from the chatter, Kiki felt calmer. When she finally logged back on, it was with the faint hope that the tempest had died down. Instead, Kiki discovered pages of hate mail, as well as a notice that MySpace was kicking her off for unspecified "disorderly conduct." Kiki was stung, but rather than pull back and leave her online life behind, she went in search of a forum to project herself even more aggressively onto the Web.

She found it in Stickam.com, a then-new site where teen users stream them-

selves live while IM'ing with viewers. "I felt like it'd be a chance for people to get to know me," Kiki explains. "I wanted to show them, 'Hey, the girl you're seeing on MySpace with all this hate is not me.' That I have feelings. I wanted to be more relatable." She was sick of feeling like a victim; this was her chance to turn things around. Besides, if she left the virtual world, she'd have to return to being Kirsten Ostrenga full-time, an unappealing prospect: a traumatized, friendless girl, a girl drowning in guilt for her family's ordeal. They were terrorized and uprooted. Her father had taken a substantial pay cut in order to quickly find a new job in the area. "I wasn't in a position to negotiate," says Scott. "We needed to get the hell out of there." And until their Coral Springs house sold, their family of five would be squeezed in with Grandma. No, it was far better to be Kiki Kannibal, fierce and funny and free.

Her Stickam debut, in July 2007, was emblematic of Kiki Kannibal posts to come. In it, 14-year-old Kiki dances like a lunatic to Styx's "Mr. Roboto" dressed in an oversize top and a hoodie with kitty ears. But as the song reaches its climax,

in your mouth." This was welcome advice to Kiki, who simply wanted to bask in the praise of the new friends who loved her. Their attention and approval gave her the affirmation she yearned for. In no time Kiki Kannibal became one of Stickam's top entertainers. "It was definitely a boost of confidence," says Kiki. She even started flirting with boys online again.

Danny Cespedes was never far from her mind, however. Keeping tabs on him, Kiki knew he'd returned to Florida and was dating yet another 14-year-old. She also knew investigators were closing in. On October 19th, 2007, police finally arrested Danny on seven felony counts of statutory rape. At least, they tried. They found him at the Aventura Mall, surrounded by a group of young girls, with cocaine stashed in his shoe and pills in his backpack. "I don't have Ecstasy anymore," Danny blurted out as officers patted him down. He didn't resist as police cuffed his hands behind his back and walked him onto a pedestrian bridge on the second floor of the parking garage. Just then, a gust of wind blew some paperwork out of an officer's hand. In that moment of confusion, Danny sudden-

ly hurred himself over the four-foot railing. He might have been aiming for the roof of a construction van parked below, hoping to flee; instead, Danny's foot caught the railing, and he tumbled to the pavement. He fell into a coma. Two months later, Kiki's rapist and first love was dead.

With spiky dark hair, an eternal five o'clock shadow and a charming smile, Stone looks like a metrosexual version of *Girls Gone Wild* impresario Joe Francis. He co-founded the site after watching Stickam's growing popularity and realizing that enabling commenters to poke fun at Stickam users was a potential gold mine.

Stone wouldn't comment for this article, but Stickam videos reveal him to be a fluid, articulate speaker – even when his self-applied caption labels him as DRUNK. His intelligence comes through in his on-line postings; as he edifies his public on the origins of democracy or on proper grammar usage, he seems to view himself as a cultivated smut peddler, more Hugh Hefner than Larry Flynt.

## AFTER REJECTING CHRIS STONE'S OFFERS, KIKI RECEIVED A MESSAGE FROM HIM THAT FILLED HER WITH DREAD: "IF I CAN'T HAVE YOU, I WILL DESTROY YOU."

ly hurred himself over the four-foot railing. He might have been aiming for the roof of a construction van parked below, hoping to flee; instead, Danny's foot caught the railing, and he tumbled to the pavement. He fell into a coma. Two months later, Kiki's rapist and first love was dead.

Her parents thought her videos were adorable. "We've always had a philosophy of letting the kids express their creativity, as long as they're not harming themselves," explains Scott softly. "There's always been supervision behind it. But we've been more permissive from a certain perspective." Cathy advised her daughter to take a "block and delete" strategy against unwanted commenters, banishing them from her chat room when they posted vulgar statements like "I want to put my cock

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**A**ROUND THAT SAME TIME, A visitor appeared in Kiki's Stickam chat room and posted a link: Stickydrama.com. When Kiki clicked it, she found a site dedicated to jeering at Stickam users – especially her. It was much like the thrashing she'd been getting all along, except this site had ads for XXX sites and was far more professional-looking than anything Kiki, now 15, had ever encountered. Little wonder, because Stickydrama's founder was no teenager but a grown man looking to cash in on teen drama.

Christopher Stone (born Watermeier) was a 28-year-old New Orleans native who earned degrees from Berkeley and NYU before settling in Los Angeles and launching Stickydrama. (He also launched Stickynoodz, which compiled naked photos of teens from social-networking sites.)

to the victim's identity ("It's hard to tell one dumb blonde from another") before concluding that she "probably won't even think it's a big deal."

Focusing on top Stickam entertainers like Kiki Kannibal was a sure way to draw traffic to Stickydrama, and at first its treatment of Kiki wasn't much worse than anyone else's. But in May 2008, Stickydrama posted a photo of Danny Cespedes dead in his coffin, alongside an item called "MySpace Murder Mystery." It detailed Danny's fatal fall, adding, "Rumor has it that Kiki Kannibal had cooperated or plotted with the police" out of revenge for Danny dumping her. As a result, Stickydrama declared Kiki "responsible for his death." Online response was furious, as consensus that Kiki had killed Danny spread throughout the Internet. "I'm gonna fucking kill her," wrote a Stickydrama commenter. Someone posted Kiki's grandmother's address and phone number, and Kiki's stalkers went into immediate overdrive. Fake Craigslist ads promoted her sexual services. She became a favored target of hackers, who hijacked her Stickam page and broadcast themselves; her phone was hacked, and her voicemails were posted online.

"Someone in my neighborhood would write me, saying, 'I see you walking your dog,' and describe my dog," says Kiki, who stopped leaving the house alone. "I was so on edge and anxious and paranoid." Already mentally fried over her rape, Danny's death, everything – she began to fantasize about suicide.

The Ostrengas tried taking action. When Cathy reached out to Stickydrama's administrator and demanded the removal of the "MySpace Murder" item, the response infuriated her. "If she were my own child I would have taken that fucking computer and Sidekick away a long time ago," wrote the administrator, presumably Stone. "If you had your daughter's best interests at heart, you would put an end to the 'Kiki Kannibal' fame that is obviously so unhealthy at her age."

State cops told the Ostrengas that Stone could face misdemeanor harassment charges – but that since he was so far away, the family should plead its case to the LAPD. The LAPD took a report on Stone, but determined the case didn't meet its criminal filing criteria. The Ostrengas also tried getting Stickydrama's Web host to pull the plug, but Stone countered by arguing that Kiki was a public figure whose image he could use however he wanted – even when it meant posting a user's Photoshopped picture of her getting fucked by a dog. The site stayed up.

The more aggressively the Ostrengas went after Stickydrama, the more personal Stone's quest to demonize Kiki and her family became: "We really are going to destroy your reputation," Stickydrama promised in one post. But while Stone rallied the mob, he was also trying to lure Kiki to his newest venture. He called it "Stickyhouse" – really his own L.A. condo – where he invited teens to live so he could film and blog the resulting drama, the more depraved the better. He had at least one steady resident, the bleached-blond Amor Hilton, who vamped about for Stone's online audience. But mostly Stickyhouse became a revolving guest list of boys, for whom Stone posted a casting call of sorts: "I'm over titties, I prefer cocks and assholes. TEEN-AGE cocks and assholes." The kids stayed rent-free, although Stone, who is gay, was straightforward about the terms, as when he posted, "I'm buttfucking a legit str8 boy tonight, or he's homeless, lol." He posted twitpics of his supposed conquests, like one of himself lying beside a sleeping teen of indeterminate age: "I have seen paradise and [name] gets to stay here another month."

Last year, Stone claimed Stickydrama pulled in a million page views per month. Still, bringing Kiki to Stickyhouse would be a major score – not only would she be his most famous guest, but Sticky fans were already speculating about what insanity would ensue if divas Amor and Kiki were living under one roof. So Stone prodded Kiki with invitations – like a sympa-

thetic e-mail telling her what a terrible mother she had, and that to escape her clutches she ought to come live with him. And he kept public interest in her high, like offering an ex-flame of Kiki's \$1,000 to take a dump on her photo.

"I don't understand what his obsession is," Kiki says, "but he has this sick, twisted love-hate relationship with me." Hardly a day would go by without Kiki's name being mentioned on one of Stone's forums. Ultimately, no law-enforcement agency ever came to the rescue. Instead, what brought Stickydrama down was Stone himself, who pushed the moral boundaries too far.

Last summer, Stickydrama speculated that an 11-year-old who posted videos under the handle "Jessi Slaughter" was dating a twentysomething emo singer. The merciless cyberbullying that followed was so overwhelming that police placed Jessi into protective custody, making headlines because of her youth. The gossip blog *Gawker* revealed Stone (by then, age 31) as the site's mastermind, and he shut down operations fast. He hastily tried auctioning off Stickydrama for \$25,000 and deleted a year's worth of tweets. Despite the efforts of the Ostrengas and at least two other Stickydrama targets, no criminal charges have been brought against him.

The reality is, there are few repercussions for online harassment. The Communications Decency Act protects Internet publishers from being sued for content – allowing people to post virtually anything without fear of consequences. Finding some kind of balance between free speech and privacy online will almost certainly become one of the major legal battles of the century. For now, however, content providers like Stone are nearly untouchable.

In fact, after wreaking so much havoc, it appears that Chris Stone has simply moved on. He is now a first-year student at an L.A. law school. But Stone is evidently not finished with Kiki. This past February, after months of silence, Stone lashed out with a pair of tweets that devastated the Ostrengas: first posting a twitpic of Danny Cespedes' death certificate, and then the first page of Kiki's sexual-assault police report. Stone's interest in continuing to torture the Ostrengas remains unclear, but Kiki recalls with dread the ominous last tweet she says Stone fired at her over the summer: "If I can't have you, I will destroy you."

**O**H, MY GOD, I JUST CHECKED my e-mail and there's that creepy pedophile!" Kiki screams, holding up her iPhone in its Hello Kitty case. She's gotten another note from a man who for three years has been sending her messages like "I'm gonna pinch your butt and slap your ass." Kiki looks amused. "What a creep!" From across the table at the Florida cafe, her parents regard her with a mixture of anxiety and weariness.

Their life is in tatters. The Coral Springs house never sold and is now in foreclosure. The Ostrengas have filed for bankruptcy – a chain of financial events they say never would have happened if they hadn't had to hastily abandon their home. Danny Cespedes' mother is suing them for causing her son's death, claiming that the Ostrengas exercised "undue influence" over Danny's mind, which led to his fatal leap. And after three years of living at Grandma's – where everyone is paranoid about leaving the house or letting outsiders get too close – the Ostrengas are chafing against each other. "Sometimes instead of fighting the bad guys, you end up fighting amongst yourselves," Cathy says.

Kiki's parents acknowledge that they wish they had made different decisions along the way. "I messed up as a parent. I did so much wrong," Cathy confesses through tears. Kiki wishes she could do so much over too. But there's one thing she refuses to change. Kiki remains a determined Internet denizen. She boasts a Twitter, a Tumblr, a Buzznet, a YouTube channel, two websites – one of which sells her jewelry and apparel – and an AIM screen name, which she gives out freely. And, of course, there's her Stickam, where she continues to stream videos, now dressed more modestly. "When I was younger, I was so naive," she says. "I didn't know people were doing things to themselves while they were watching me."

She can't go offline. One reason is practical: Kiki has a business to run. But the other reason is more existential: If she were to go offline, her link to the world would disappear. This is a girl with 12,000 Twitter followers whose actual life is empty of real relationships. She's trapped in suburban isolation; outside the bubble of her family, her most meaningful interactions are electronic. In real life, she's lost.

"How do you even meet people?" Kiki asks. "Like, how do you *connect* with people? In person, it's just so weird, no one talks to me." Even online, surrounded by hundreds of fans, Kiki feels alone. "I feel like a butterfly in a jar," she says. "They'll watch me. And they'll take from me. But no one ever connects."

For all of Kiki's digital exposure, she feels like no one knows the real Kiki: the one who's taking courses at a community college and working at a retail store for extra cash; the one who spends her nights with her family hunched around Grandma's dining-room table, gluing Swarovski crystals onto jewelry to fill orders for her struggling company; the one who has unhealthy online relationships with the older men she finds herself drawn to. Her online life has become an endless, soul-sucking performance. And yet, seeing no other option, she continues marching onward, a child of the digital age, programmed to look only toward the future, still optimistic, somehow, about what she'll find there. ☘