



BY SARAH SCHMELLING + PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHERYL NIELDS

RORY GILMORE, IN A BUSTIER, big hair and cowboy boots, leans over a car window. Benicio Del Toro leers out at her — she's apparently a prostitute — and says something about how she should take a look at what he's "got." There's much flirty banter, but suddenly things get serious. He pulls out a gun and orders her to get in the car, or else.

Then Rory — Yale student, high-school valedictorian, avid reader of Proust and P.G. Wodehouse — widens her blue eyes and says, "Aw, sugar, you just gone and done the dumbest thing you ever done in your life."

No, this is not *Gilmore Girls*. This is a Frank Miller graphic novel brought to life by director Robert Rodriguez for his film, *Sin City*. And it's not Rory playing Becky the Hooker, it's Alexis Bledel, a 23-year-old Texan actress and former model.

In the white-walled enclave within the photo studio where we meet, Rory is nowhere to be found. Instead, Bledel, in jeans, a puffy black jacket and deep eye shadow left over from the photo shoot, sits on a red vinyl sofa, sipping something giant

from Starbucks. "I've never felt very close to Rory," she says. "But I don't know how personal I feel to any character. I think it's more about finding out who that person is, and then kind of making that character outside of myself."

Which explains why *Sin City*'s Becky — a seemingly giant leap from her normal roles — doesn't feel like such a stretch for Bledel. "It was fun to do something different," she says about the part. "But it's also just fun to play someone my own age."

Her age? In *Sin City*, the first thing you notice about Becky isn't how old she is. But it seems apparent that Bledel isn't trying to make some huge step into more adult roles. She's just doing the projects she can squeeze into her three months off a year. "It's not like we have options that are limitless," she frowns. "It's really whatever falls into that time period."

For a film that dropped into her schedule, she could have done a lot worse. Bledel loved it all: the cast, the not knowing what the final film will look like ("It's challenging, the green screen — no props, no set or anything"), the familial vibe of

the production company, and that the whole thing was shot in her home state. "We could just go out after work, in *Austin*," she stresses. "It was great."

Sin City isn't her only film this year. She had a small role in the Jane-Austen-goes-Bollywood flick, *Bride and Prejudice*, plus a part in the very family-style *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*. But it sounds like Rodriguez's film is closer to what she wants to do, once the world of the Gilmores comes to a close. "I don't think I can physically do another TV show," she says of future plans. "This has so been draining. So I'm pretty excited for the day when I get a break."

This isn't dissing the show, just being realistic: Anyone who's ever watched it knows characters talk in detailed monologues and back-and-forths, spewing out pop-culture references like *Seinfeld* threw out catch phrases. "It is so challenging," Bledel says. "It's a paragraph of dialogue, and it has to be fast, and it has to be exactly right."

It's also time-consuming. When the show first got huge, interviews in the teen zines spouted things like, "She's so busy, she has no time to water plants, let alone for a boyfriend!" That appears to have changed; though she won't talk about it, Bledel's linked to former *Gilmore* co-star Milo Ventimiglia. Still, you don't hear her name dropped in talk of Young Hollywood partying it up in Sunset clubs: "It's not what I naturally gravitate towards," she says. She also has no envy of other teen stars, say, Lindsay Lohan or Hillary Duff, having their faces plastered everywhere. "I don't think that would be right for my life, or my personality," she says. "But I don't look at it and think that's a terrible thing either. I almost think, 'I hope she's okay... I hope she's taking care of herself,' because they're young, they're working really hard and they have a lot of public scrutiny."

But Becky the Hooker could open some doors. I'm not the only one who expected to see Rory when I met her — it's something she runs up against every time she goes to an audition — and before now, the only other major film role she's had was as a corseted teen in Disney's *Tuck Everlasting* in 2002. "One of the things you can't help in life is how you look," she explains. "I look young. So people probably won't cast me in certain directions."

So it could help being a *Sin City* "Old Towne Girl" ("You don't mess with them, cause they're really tough," she grins), but again, she's too busy to spend time thinking about it. "There are so many other things in the world besides acting," she sighs, looking at the ceiling, then back to me. "I appreciate the opportunities, but it's so unpredictable. I'm not going to plan on being a pop star or an Oscar winner; it's not entirely under my control."

"Acting is just a job, it doesn't define me," she continues. "If I can do things that I like, I'll keep doing it as much as I can... but who knows?"

Then, she leans forward on the couch, forcing it to break into a plasticky squeak. "You know what I like, I like the movies where I'm not the main character a lot of times, because it's less nerve-wracking. Everyone comes in at different times and you don't know what it's going to look like until it fits together. That's kind of fun."

All I can say is, Alexis, if you keep evolving as an actress the way you are, side roles are really not your future.