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For an Aspiring Singer, a Harsher Spotlight

By **SERGE F. KOVALESKI** and **IAN URBINA**

She left a broken home on the Jersey Shore at 17 and came to New York City to work the nightclubs as a rhythm and blues singer. Now, at 22, she is the unwitting, and as yet unseen, star of the seamy drama that is the downfall of Gov. Eliot Spitzer of New York.

Kristen, the prostitute described in a federal affidavit as having had a rendezvous with Mr. Spitzer on Feb. 13 at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, has spent the last few days in her ninth-floor apartment in the Flatiron district of Manhattan. On Monday, she made a brief appearance in federal court, where a lawyer was appointed to represent her. She is expected to be a witness in the case against four people charged with operating a prostitution ring called the Emperor's Club V.I.P.

In a series of telephone interviews on Tuesday night, she said she had slept very little over the past week, with all the stress of the case.

"I just don't want to be thought of as a monster," the woman said as she told the tiniest tidbits of her story.

Born Ashley Youmans but now known as Ashley Alexandra Dupré, she spoke softly and with good humor as she added with significant understatement: "This has been a very difficult time. It is complicated."

She has not been charged. The lawyer appointed to represent her, Don D. Buchwald, told a magistrate judge in court on Monday that she had been subpoenaed to testify in a grand jury investigation. Asked to swear that she had accurately filled out and signed a financial affidavit, she responded affirmatively.

A person with knowledge of the Emperor's Club operation confirmed that the woman interviewed by The New York Times was the woman identified as Kristen in the affidavit. Mr. Buchwald confirmed various details of Ms. Dupré's background but would not discuss the contents of the affidavit.

Ms. Dupré said by telephone Tuesday night that she was worried about how she would pay her rent since the man she was living with "walked out on me" after she discovered he had fathered two children. She said she was considering working at a friend's restaurant or, once her apartment lease expires, moving back with her family in New Jersey "to relax."

She did not say when she had started working for the Emperor's Club, or how often she had liaisons arranged through the ring. Asked when she met Governor Spitzer and how many times they had seen each other, Ms. Dupré said she had no comment.

As of Wednesday morning, Ms. Dupré's MySpace page recounted her "odyssey to New York from New Jersey

through North Carolina, Miami, D.C., Virginia and Austin, Texas;" public records show that she lived in Monmouth County, N.J., in 2001, and in North Carolina in 2003. She owns a company, created in 2005, called Pasche New York, which her lawyer said was an entertainment business designed to further her singing career.

Music is her first love, and on the MySpace page, Ms. Dupré mentions Patsy Cline, Frank Sinatra, Christina Aguilera and Lauryn Hill among a long list of influences, including her brother, Kyle. (She also lists Whitney Houston, Madonna, Mary J. Blige and Amy Winehouse as her top MySpace friends.) In the interview, she said she saw the Rolling Stones perform at Radio City Music Hall on their last tour after a friend gave her two tickets. "They were amazing," she said.

On MySpace, her page says: "I am all about my music and my music is all about me. It flows from what I've been through, what I've seen and how I feel."

She left "a broken family" at age 17, having been abused, according to the MySpace page, and has used drugs and "been broke and homeless."

"Learned what it was like to have everything and lose it, again and again," she writes. "Learned what it was like to wake up one day and have the people you care about most gone."

"But I made it," she continues. "I'm still here and I love who I am. If I never went through the hard times, I would not be able to appreciate the good ones. Cliché, yes, but I know it's true."

Ms. Dupré's mother, Carolyn Capalbo, 46, said that after her daughter finished sophomore year in high school, Ms. Dupré moved to North Carolina. "She was a young kid with typical teenage rebellion issues, but we are extremely close now," Ms. Capalbo said in a telephone interview Wednesday.

In 2006, Ms. Dupré changed her legal name, according to records in Monmouth County Superior Court, from Ashley R. Youmans to Ashley Rae Maika DiPietro, taking her stepfather's surname since she regarded him as "the only father I have known." But in the interview, she referred to herself as Ashley Alexandra Dupré, which is how she is known on MySpace.

On the Web page is a recording of what she describes as her latest track, "What We Want," a hip-hop-inflected rhythm-and-blues tune that asks, "Can you handle me, boy?" and uses some dated slang, calling someone her "boo."

"I know what you want, you got what I want," she sings in the chorus. "I know what you need. Can you handle me?"

Her MySpace biography says she started singing professionally after a musician she was living with heard her singing the Aretha Franklin hit "Respect" in the shower and burst into the bathroom with his lead guitarist. She says she toured and recorded with them, then moved to Manhattan in 2004 and "spent the first two years getting to know the music scene, networking in clubs and connecting with the industry."

"Now it's all about my music, it's all about expressing me."

In the affidavit, the woman the Emperor's Club called Kristen is described as "an American, petite, very

pretty brunette, 5 feet 5 inches, and 105 pounds.” She apparently was booked at about \$1,000 an hour, placing her in the middle of the seven-diamond scale by which the prostitutes were paid up to \$4,300 an hour.

Ms. Capalbo said that she was “shell-shocked” when her daughter called in the middle of last week and told her she had been working as an escort and was now in trouble with the law. She said she was not sure that Ms. Dupré realized who Mr. Spitzer was when he was her client.

“She is a very bright girl who can handle someone like the governor,” Ms. Capalbo said. “But she also is a 22-year-old, not a 32-year-old or a 42-year-old, and she obviously got involved in something much larger than her.”

Benjamin Weiser contributed reporting.

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