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No Prison Time Likely for Accused Madam

By SEAN GARDINER

A high-profile case against an upstate woman accused of running a lucrative Upper East Side brothel and boasting of her connections to law enforcement ended with far less fanfare Tuesday when the woman pleaded guilty in a deal that is likely to keep her out of prison.

Once dubbed the "Manhattan Madam" and the "Soccer Mom Madam," Anna Gristina pleaded guilty to one count of promoting prostitution, a low-level felony, and quietly accepted Manhattan Supreme Court Judge Juan Merchan's offer of six months of jail time followed by five years of probation.

Ms. Gristina already served four months in jail on Rikers Island when she was unable to make an initial \$2 million bail. Her bail was eventually reduced. After a reduction in the sentence for good behavior, Ms. Gristina is unlikely to spend another day in jail, the judge said.

Sentencing is set for Nov. 20.

Outside court, Ms. Gristina's lawyer, Norman Pattis, said he wanted to take the case to trial, but "Ms. Gristina took the plea because it was too good to be true." Until her guilty plea, Ms. Gristina

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Anna Gristina exiting Manhattan criminal court in New York on Tuesday.

maintained she ran only a high-end dating service.

The case against Ms. Gristina, a Scottish-born 44-year-old mother of four who lives on an upstate farm, received an inordinate amount of media coverage after her arrest in February amid an unconfirmed belief that she guarded a client list of recognizable and powerful figures in politics, sports and banking.

Her lawyers contended in court papers that Ms. Gristina was being "vindictively prosecuted" because she refused to provide investigators with the names of five well-connected male customers, who weren't identified. No list ever materialized publicly.

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The case grew out of an investigation that began five years ago. The interest of prosecutors was especially piqued by wiretap recordings made during an undercover probe in July 2011 in the brothel she allegedly ran in an East 78th Street apartment building. In the conversations, Ms. Gristina claimed she paid law-enforcement officials in nearly every state and federal agency in New York for protection, prosecutors said.

Addressing the court at the surprise hearing, prosecutor Charles Linehan told Judge Merchan that after a thorough investigation, "We have not found any evidence to support any of those claims."

"We are left with a straightforward prostitution case," Mr. Linehan said.

The prosecutor made no recommendation for a sentence. Mr. Pattis asked that Ms. Gristina, a first-time offender, be given a sentence of time served.

Judge Merchan chided Ms. Gristina for her behavior during the case, although he didn't single out anything other than to note she was flanked in court by her 9-year-old son and another teenage son.

"I am not happy that Ms. Gristina's young child is in the courtroom today," the judge said. "I do not think that is good judgment."

The judge questioned why Ms. Gristina would "expose" her son "to this." But he said he was bound by the law to impose "a sentence that is consistent with other defendants similarly charged."

Ms. Gristina gave several media interviews after her arrest and changed lawyers three times before settling on Mr. Pattis.

Ms. Gristina had faced 2 1/3 to seven years in prison. The judge also told Ms. Gristina that by pleading guilty to the felony, she could trigger deportation proceedings.

The judge warned Ms. Gristina, "My promise to you is conditional." He said that if Ms. Gristina attempted to minimize her guilt in the case, before her sentencing, he would withdraw the plea offer.

Outside court, Ms. Gristina and her attorneys were mobbed by reporters while walking the two blocks to her parked car.

Trailing the throng, her husband, Kelvin Gorr, said, "I'm very pleased. I'm not going to go to Disneyworld, but I'm glad it's over."

Mr. Pattis claimed that Ms. Gristina realized that "to successfully defend this case would have required permitting me to hurt people close to Mrs. Gristina....Rather than hurt those people, Ms. Gristina has elected to end this fight."

However, Mr. Pattis said that he anticipates that authorities will launch an aggressive attempt to deport his client to Scotland.

"I think that's going to be a dogfight," Mr. Pattis said, outside the courthouse. "That's a very bitter piece of litigation to come." ■