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Rockville Dancer Beaten to Death; Body Found in Grave Identified

BY KATHERINE SHAVER AND RUBEN CASTENEDA

Emily Cagal, the 24-year-old exotic dancer who police said was killed in her Rockville penthouse condominium, was beaten to death in what investigators suspect was a gruesome robbery.

Authorities confirmed late yesterday that a body found Tuesday night in a shallow grave in Upper Marlboro has been identified as Cagal's. The Maryland medical examiner's office said she was killed by "blunt force trauma."

Cagal had been missing since March 2, when Montgomery County authorities say she was killed in her Grosvenor Place condominium and carried out in a footlocker by two Largo men who were charged last week in her slaying. The wicker footlocker was found near her body in woods along the 4500 block of Melwood Road.

The men worked as Cagal's bodyguards while she danced for private parties, and one was a former boyfriend, according to charging documents.

Investigators are pursuing the theory that Cagal was beaten to death for cash and other items stolen from her condominium, said a law enforcement source with knowledge of the case. The source spoke on condition of anonymity because the investigation is ongoing.

One of the men, Antoine Levelle Gatewood, 33, is being held without bail on a first-degree murder charge. **His attorney, Steven Kupferberg, said yesterday that Gatewood and Cagal were "acquaintances for some time." Kupferberg declined to comment further.** Police said that Gatewood was Cagal's former boyfriend.

Gatewood's roommate, Dion D. Desir, 24, was being held yesterday in lieu of \$750,000 bail on a charge of being an accessory after the fact for allegedly helping Gatewood clean up blood in Cagal's condominium and dispose of her body. Montgomery prosecutors said the men were seen with numerous \$100 bills in the days after Cagal's disappearance.

Meanwhile, Cagal's parents mourned their daughter while trying to reconcile what they believed they knew of her, as a financially struggling college student, with news accounts of her working as a dancer under the name Jordan.

Cagal's parents declined to comment yesterday, but Timur Edib, a Rockville lawyer and family friend, said they did not know until she was missing that she had been working as an exotic dancer for a Baltimore area company, Touch Too Much Entertainment.

Her parents, who live in Bethesda, believed she was studying graphic arts at Montgomery College, Edib said.

Cagal lived in a 700-square-foot penthouse unit at the Grosvenor Place condominiums in the 10200 block of Grosvenor Place. She attended Montgomery College part time for two years but had not taken classes since the spring of 2004, a college spokesman said.

A friend remembered Cagal as a "spirited" and "open-hearted" teenager who was overweight before she slimmed down and began working for D.C. strip clubs under the name Ivy when she was 19. Cagal told friends that she was home-schooled and that her parents were devoutly religious, said the friend, who spoke on condition of anonymity out of concern for the family's feelings.

When she was about 18, she moved out of her parents' home. Her mother teaches piano and her father works as an accountant, the friend said.

"You had this young girl who'd been very overweight and lived a sheltered life and suddenly finds she has sex appeal, and she didn't know what to do with it," the friend said.

Joanne Cooper, owner of Touch Too Much Entertainment, said Cagal worked part time for the company for two years. Like most female dancers, Cagal employed her own bodyguards to handle the money and unruly customers, Cooper said.

She said Cagal made "probably a couple hundred a week" dancing for the company after pocketing tips and paying the company an "agency fee" for booking parties.

"She was very outgoing and would speak her mind," Cooper said. "If she didn't like something, or if someone at a party got out of hand, she'd go right back at them. . . . Why someone would hurt her I just can't fathom." ■

Staff researcher Madonna Lebling contributed to this report.

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