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A Revenge Plot So Intricate, the Prosecutors Were Pawns

By **DAN BILEFSKY**

Soon after Seemona Sumasar started dating Jerry Ramrattan, she had an inkling that something might be wrong.

He said he was a police detective, but never seemed to go to work. He seemed obsessed with “C.S.I.,” “Law & Order” and other television police dramas.

About a year after he moved into her house in Queens, their relationship soured. One day, he cornered her, taped her mouth and raped her, she said. Mr. Ramrattan was arrested.

But he soon took his revenge, the authorities said. Drawing on his knowledge of police procedure, gleaned from his time as an informer for law enforcement, he accomplished what prosecutors in New York called one of the most elaborate framing plots that they had ever seen.

One night, Ms. Sumasar was pulled over by the police. Before she could speak, detectives slapped handcuffs on her. “You know you did it,” she said one later shouted at her. “Just admit it.”

Ms. Sumasar, a former Morgan Stanley analyst who was running a restaurant, said she had no idea what that meant. Yet suddenly, she was being treated like a brazen criminal. She was charged with carrying out a series of armed robberies, based on what the police said was a wealth of evidence, including credible witness statements and proof that her car was the getaway vehicle.

In her first extensive interview about her ordeal, she recalled sitting in jail, consumed by one thought: “Jerry is behind this.”

But when she insisted to the authorities that he had set her up, they belittled her claims.

Now, though, they concede that Ms. Sumasar was right — an astonishing turn of events that has transformed her case into one of the most bizarre in the city’s recent history.

They released her from jail last December after seven months, acknowledging that the entire case against her had been concocted by Mr. Ramrattan, officials said.

“We prosecute tens of thousands of cases each year, but in the collective memory, no one has ever seen anything like this before,” said Richard A. Brown, the Queens district attorney.

“Few people have the capacity to pull off a master plot of this magnitude to exact revenge,” Mr. Brown said.

Mr. Ramrattan framed Ms. Sumasar because she would not drop the rape charge, prosecutors said.

And so even as Mr. Ramrattan remained free on bail in the rape case, Ms. Sumasar, who had no prior criminal record, was facing up to 25 years in prison.

Despondent, Ms. Sumasar passed her days behind bars scouring the indictments against her for clues that could help prove her innocence, even as news of lurid crimes that she had not committed were splashed in newspapers.

“From the beginning, I said he made it up,” Ms. Sumasar said. “I never thought my life would become a cop film.”

Ms. Sumasar, 36, is bubbly and petite. She never finished college but used her analytical skills to land six-figure jobs on Wall Street. Yet she acknowledged she can be too trusting.

After her arrest, she lost her restaurant franchise and her house in Far Rockaway went into foreclosure. She was separated from her daughter, Chiara, 12.

Ms. Sumasar is now planning lawsuits against the Police Departments in New York City and in Nassau County, the location of one of her purported robberies, over her arrest. Neither agency would comment.

Mr. Ramrattan never worked as a law enforcement officer, prosecutors say, but he often presented himself as a private investigator.

Mr. Ramrattan, who is being held at Rikers Island, appeared this month in a Queens court, where a judge refused a request for bail and set his trial date on the rape and conspiracy

charges for Oct. 3. He has pleaded not guilty to both. He and his supporters are now voicing their own theory of the case: Ms. Sumasar framed him.

“My son is innocent, he was set up,” said Shirley Ramrattan, Mr. Ramrattan’s mother.

Mr. Ramrattan’s lawyer, Frank Kelly, said, “Everything about Ms. Sumasar and her associates will come out.”

Some legal experts say Ms. Sumasar’s story shows how the American justice system can be easily manipulated, with the principle of innocent until proven guilty turned on its head.

Prosecutors countered that the web of false evidence presented by Mr. Ramrattan was so detailed they had little reason to doubt it.

But Anthony Grandinette, Ms. Sumasar’s former lawyer, said law enforcement was negligent.

“Why would a tiny woman with no criminal record, who worked 10 years on Wall Street, randomly hold up people at gunpoint at night dressed as a policewoman?” Mr. Grandinette asked.

Ms. Sumasar, the daughter of an Indian taxi company owner from the South American nation of Guyana, was the embodiment of immigrant success.

When Mr. Ramrattan, dressed in a suit and tie, first entered her restaurant in 2006 and introduced himself as a police detective, Ms. Sumasar, a single mother, recalled being impressed.

The two began dating, and Mr. Ramrattan eventually moved into Ms. Sumasar’s house. At first, he seemed attentive, but she grew suspicious of him. He lied constantly, she said.

“I said to Jerry, ‘You tell so many lies, I think you actually believe what you are saying,’ ” Ms. Sumasar said.

Throughout 2008, she said she begged him to leave but he refused.

After Ms. Sumasar said she was attacked, on March 8, 2009, she pressed rape charges against Mr. Ramrattan, who was arrested and released on bail. Soon after, Mr. Ramrattan sent friends to intimidate her, prosecutors said.

They said that when she would not back down, he vowed to put her away.

The key to his scheme, prosecutors said, was to spread fake clues over time, fooling police into believing that all the evidence pointed to Ms. Sumasar.

They said he coached the supposed victims, driving them past Ms. Sumasar's house so that they could describe her Jeep Grand Cherokee and showing them her photo so they could pick her out of a police lineup.

The setup began in September 2009, prosecutors said. An illegal immigrant from Trinidad told the police that he had been handcuffed and robbed of \$700 by an Indian woman who was disguised as a police officer and had a gun, according to court documents.

Prosecutors said Mr. Ramrattan had persuaded the immigrant to lie, telling him that he could receive a special visa for victims of violent crimes.

Six months later, another man said he had been robbed in Nassau County by two police impersonators and described the main aggressor as an Indian woman about Ms. Sumasar's height. The man said he had managed to take down the first three letters of the Jeep Grand Cherokee's New York license plate — AJD.

All the while, Ms. Sumasar had a strong alibi, including cell phone records showing that calls were made from her phone at a casino in Connecticut on the day of the robbery.

But Sheryl Anania, executive assistant district attorney in Nassau County, said Ms. Sumasar's business was foundering, so she appeared to have a motive.

The final fake crime was conjured in May 2010, officials said, when an acquaintance of Mr. Ramrattan said she had been held up by a couple posing as police officers. She said they were driving a Grand Cherokee, but she gave a full Florida license plate number.

She said she heard the pair call each other by name — “Seem” and “Elvis.” Elvis was the nickname of another former boyfriend of Ms. Sumasar, who owned the Jeep.

When the police looked into the Florida plate number, they found that the day after the purported March robbery, the title and the plate for the Cherokee had been transferred from Elvis to Ms. Sumasar's sister in Florida.

Ms. Sumasar, who holds a Florida driver's license, had driven the car to Florida to register it. To the police, she seemed to be covering her tracks.

With all the evidence pointing to Ms. Sumasar, the police arrested her. Bail was set at \$1

million.

Prosecutors said the scheme unraveled in December 2010 — just weeks before Ms. Sumasar was to go on trial — when an informer told the police that Mr. Ramrattan had staged the plot. The informer gave detectives a number for a cellphone owned by Mr. Ramrattan.

When they checked phone records, they discovered multiple calls to the false witnesses, who confessed to the police. They were charged with perjury.

Today, Ms. Sumasar is trying to rebuild her life.

She checks the Rikers Web site frequently to make sure Mr. Ramrattan has not been released or escaped. She once paid for purchases with cash but now uses only credit cards, so there is a paper trail attesting to her whereabouts.

“From the beginning I was presumed guilty — not innocent,” she said. “I felt like I never had a chance.”

“I can never have faith in justice in this country again.”