

Rape claim 'part of extortion bid'

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By TONY STICKLEY

A woman has gone on trial accused of trying to blackmail a man with a false allegation of rape.

Tua Letufuga, aged 44, of Mangere, allegedly tried to extort \$3000 from the owner of a motor repair business last April.

Blackmail victims cannot be identified.

Crown prosecutor Yelena Yelavich told the High Court at Auckland yesterday that the pair struck up a relationship after Letufuga brought a car in for repairs.

She visited him a number of times and eventually the flirting progressed to sex.

Yelena Yelavich told the jury in her opening address that Letufuga was a willing participant.

However, her mood changed and she became hostile and angry towards the garage owner for not fixing her car.

Letufuga, who is represented by Satendra Singh, allegedly threatened to tell the man's wife about his infidelity and also threatened to lay a complaint of rape with the police.

There were also implied threats that he would go to jail and lose his family and business.

Yelena Yelavich said the man made an arrangement for Letufuga to bring her

car in for repair 12 days later, but she phoned wanting the car fixed earlier, and made more threats. Later that day she went to a counselling service in Papatoetoe and claimed she had been raped.

However, said Yelena Yelavich, she refused to go for a medical examination and said that she would go to the police herself to report the alleged rape.

Yelena Yelavich said that a couple of days later "things became even more serious."

Letufuga allegedly said she would report the man to the police for rape if he did not give her \$3000.

The woman returned to the counselling service, where she told a different counsellor - who had no knowledge of her first visit or the rape allegation - that she had paid \$3000 in advance for repairs to her car and wanted the money back because the work had not been done properly.

A document outlining the \$3000 reparation was prepared by the counsellor and presented by Letufuga for the man to sign.

Yelena Yelavich said the man agreed to sign and handed over \$150 on the spot.

"He was very frightened," she said. "He was concerned that his wife might find out. He was also very worried about the threat by the accused to make a complaint of rape to the police."

However, when Letufuga made further calls wanting the \$3000 as a lump sum, the man consulted his lawyer and reported the blackmail to the police.

When interviewed, Letufuga claimed she had been raped but denied making any threats.

The trial, before Justice Randerson, is expected to end today.

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