

THE long, black robe worn by Muslim women covers her from head to toe. Her light-blue eyes dart around the empty courtroom in bewilderment, searching for familiar faces.

Then Roxanne Hillier sees her father, Freddie, and they both breathe a sigh of relief. Her eyes show tension but Freddie can also see the Muslim sex-crime nightmare his 22-year-old daughter has been caught up in won't break her spirit.

When she gets the opportunity she whispers to him that she's okay – despite having been locked up in a prison cell in a small town in the United Arab Emirates since 16 May.

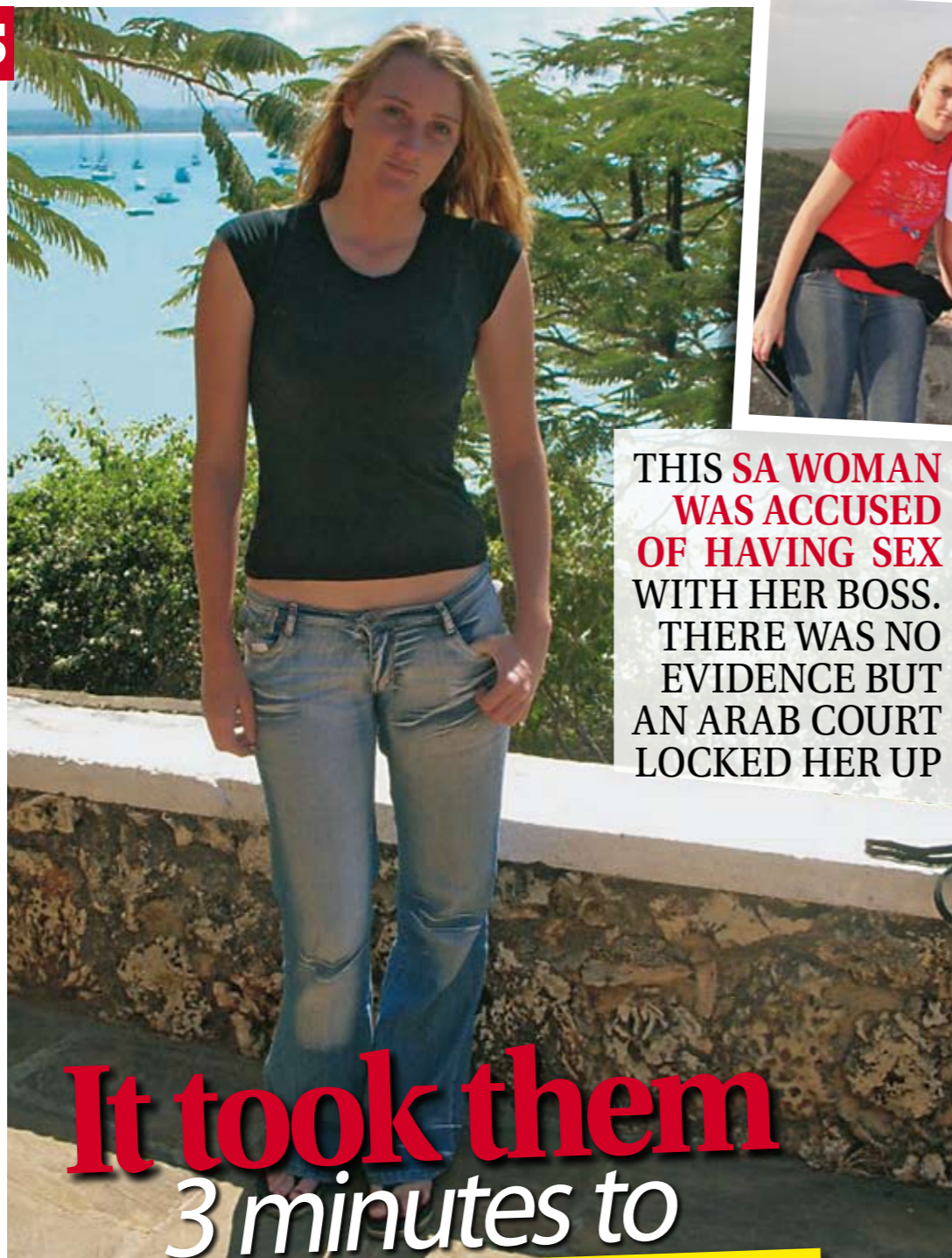
As Freddie waits on a court bench the stress of the past few days eats at him. Powerless against the Emirates' laws, he's as despondent and worried as only a parent can be.

He's also furious – enraged because Roxanne, who is a qualified diving instructor and has worked as a rescue diver in the town of Khor Fakkan in the Sharjah emirate since November, has been accused of extramarital sex with her employer. And because the South African consulate hardly lifted a finger to help them.

He hasn't understood much of what went on in court, except that Roxanne was convicted of the charge after a three-minute appearance. Only three simple questions were put to her, in answer to which she denied all guilt.

On 1 June Roxanne was sentenced to three months in prison, with only the dim hope of an appeal succeeding. After her release she'll be deported. But her distraught father believes now that she has a criminal record Roxanne can forget about ever getting another overseas work visa.

FOR Roxanne, adventurous to



**It took them
3 minutes to**

JAIL HER

the core, the two-year post at the diving centre was a dream come true. The last thing she expected as she packed her bags for the Emirates was a hellish jail experience.

On the night things went

awry she and her employer came back very late after two difficult dives during the day.

"She didn't want to go to her flat on her own because it was quite far from the diving centre and it was already late,"

says Freddie, who works as an engineer in Albania.

Roxanne's bathroom was also being tiled and there were problems with the plumbing.

She decided to sleep in a room on the top floor of

THIS SA WOMAN WAS ACCUSED OF HAVING SEX WITH HER BOSS. THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE BUT AN ARAB COURT LOCKED HER UP



MAIN PICTURE: Roxanne Hillier at a yacht club in Tanzania, where the Hilliers used to live. **ABOVE:** Roxanne (left) with dad Freddie and sister Maxine.

the centre and locked the door.

Later, through the bars of her cell, she told Freddie how police officials had pulled her from a corner where she had curled up to hide after hearing noises in the night.

She was taken to a hospital for medical tests.

His voice is full of emotion as he repeats Roxanne's words. "Dad, I was so scared. They pushed all sorts of things up me."

Despite the tests coming back negative for sexual intercourse she was found guilty of having had sex with her boss.

That night in the hospital she didn't understand a word of the questioning. "Later she just said 'yes, yes' so they'd leave her alone," Freddie says.

She was forced to sign a statement in Arabic she didn't understand.

By Danél Blaauw

Freddie and his wife, Ina, talk to their children every day and they became concerned when they hadn't heard from Roxanne. They also received a call from their other daughter, Maxine (20), who works in Abu Dhabi and is also a qualified diving instructor, to say she couldn't find her sister.

When Maxine eventually called with the news of Roxanne's arrest they were frantic.

"I immediately called the embassy's emergency number but got no reply." Freddie jumped on the first flight he could get to Dubai. Ina stayed behind until she could get a visa.

The relationship between Roxanne and her boss is platonic, Freddie says.

He and Ina raised their children to respect others, he says, and his daughter wouldn't have shown contempt for the Muslim laws that designate extramarital sex a crime.

"We spent seven years in Tanzania, a predominantly Muslim country. We taught the girls to respect all people irrespective of their colour, religion or culture."

The first time Freddie visited Roxanne she appeared fragile in jeans and a T-shirt but smiled bravely and assured them she could handle the situation.

Roxanne is the only South African held in the prison and struggles to understand the other inmates. "Luckily there's one other girl who speaks Eng-

OTHERS CHARGED WITH SEX CRIMES IN THE UAE

In February Briton Marnie Pearce (40) was sentenced to three months' imprisonment in Dubai after her ex-husband, an Egyptian, claimed she had cheated on him.

It was daytime – as she was making tea for a friend who was sending an e-mail in another room – when police stormed into her flat and arrested her.

Pearce lost custody of her two sons and was due to be deported immediately after her release in April. This order has been postponed while she fights to regain custody.

A few years ago police arrested French businesswoman Touria Tiouli after she'd reported being raped by three men for several hours. One of the men admitted sex had taken place but claimed it had been consensual. Tiouli was then charged with extramarital sex and making a false statement.

lish and she translates for her."

On 22 May she spent her 22nd birthday behind bars. There was no special meal, a birthday drink or a cake, just more of the spicy prison food that has upset her stomach.

She's allowed only two 15-minute visits a week but the support group her friends started on Facebook and the messages she receives this way make her feel stronger, he says.

"It's really hard for us. We know she's innocent but we can't prove it."

When he goes to bed at night he's very aware of his daughter's pain. "We won't stop fighting. She's innocent and we'll keep fighting until we've proved it."

A few days ago when a lawyer appealed against Roxanne's sentence Ina and Maxine were present in court. "It was difficult. Everything was in Arabic and we didn't understand a thing. It sounds bizarre

but I don't know on what grounds we appealed," Ina says. Roxanne was to hear the outcome of the appeal on 21 June.

Her head was filled with dreams when she left to work at one of the best diving centres in the Emirates. Things were still looking rosy when Maxine followed her in February to work in Abu Dhabi.

"It was their big dream and now it has become their biggest nightmare," Freddie says, explaining his daughters love the outdoors and live for the sea.

"Roxanne has always wanted to own her own boat and take people scuba-diving in the ocean."

Hopefully her current prison ordeal won't put paid to that. □



SA woman held for 'sex
"No evidence of intercourse" – but 22-year-old and boss in Emirates

SA woman jailed in UAE
2009-06-01 22:35

LEFT: Roxanne and Maxine on their way to Rome by train. **RIGHT:** Roxanne on a diving course in Tanzania. **ABOVE RIGHT:** In Khor Fakkan, Sharjah, where she pursued her passion working as a rescue diver.

