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Judge says: Fight was over, yet...

AS her elderly employer lay dead nine floors below after being pushed out of a window, Indonesian maid Barokah pretended she knew nothing of it.

When her employer's husband and a neighbour asked where Madam Wee Keng Wah was, she claimed not to know, then said the 75-year-old grandmother had gone out for her morning exercise.

And Barokah may have got away with killing her employer if not for the sharp eyes of police crime scene investigators, who found some of Madam Wee's blood and hair in the latter's bedroom.

### **COLD-BLOODED**

In his judgment released this week, High Court judge Tay Yong Kwang called Barokah 'cold-blooded' and 'dangerous'.

He explained why he sentenced the 28-year-old maid, who had pleaded guilty to manslaughter, to life imprisonment last November.

He said: 'Throwing any person, let alone a completely helpless, unconscious elderly woman, down from the ninth storey to die on impact shows how cold-blooded and dangerous the killer must be, even after taking into account the diagnosis of depression...'

He noted that Barokah, who is from Central Java, was not ill-treated in the one month she was working for the family, and that if she was sentenced to a shorter jail term, she may possibly return to Singapore under an assumed identity.

He pointed out: 'With (her) personality disorder, her violent temperament and her unstable employment history, there is every likelihood that something will flare up again and that someone in future (can) get hurt badly, if not killed.'

Madam Wee was killed because she had ticked off the maid earlier for sneaking out for an illicit tryst and threatened to sack her.

## **DROPPED FROM HEIGHT**

Justice Tay noted: 'If Madam Wee had jumped out of her bedroom window, her body would have landed further away from the base of the HDB block.'

'As Madam Wee's body was found directly below her bedroom window, that suggested that it had been dropped from a height.'

He added that the stains of grime on her sleeve and back of her T-shirt were similar to that on the top of the air-conditioning compressor directly outside the bedroom window.

This meant that her back had touched the compressor during the fall.

If she had jumped, there would be evidence of contact between her feet or hands and the compressor.

'All the above evidence suggested that Madam Wee had been pushed sideways out of the bedroom window,' the judge noted.

The spots of blood in the room and on the bedsheet indicated a struggle or fight in the bedroom.

There was also some hair along the floor skirting below the window.

A plastic rack with rollers had been toppled and broken into pieces, with its contents scattered in the bedroom.

And the victims's and the maid's fingernails were stained with each other's DNA, confirming a struggle before the fatal fall.

The evidence gave Barokah away.

The maid had been hired, just a month earlier, to look after Madam Wee's husband, Mr Lee Tang Seng, 78, who has Parkinson's disease, diabetes and other ailments.

It was her fourth job in five years, having worked for three other Singapore families previously.

On the day of the killing, Madam Wee had scolded Barokah because she had sneaked out at night to meet her Bangladeshi boyfriend.

The confrontation escalated into a fight that knocked Madam Wee unconscious.

And when Mr Lee left the flat to get help, Barokah threw the elderly woman out of the window.

Her state-assigned lawyers, Senior Counsel Harpreet Singh Nehal and Mr Wendell Wong, pleaded for leniency on her behalf, saying that when she was employed by Madam Wee's family, she was feeling troubled and depressed.

Her husband was having an extra-marital relationship and she felt guilty over her own affair with a Bangladeshi man.

### **BEGGED FORGIVENESS**

The lawyers also produced a note from Barokah to Madam Wee's family, asking for their forgiveness.

They asked the judge to impose a shorter jail term as Barokah's actions were the result of her mental disorder and impulse.

They added that in May 2006, she gave birth to a baby girl she had conceived with her boyfriend.

There was no premeditation, they said, adding that she has since been cooperative with the police and was remorseful.

But Justice Tay said that Barokah was dangerous.

'It's undisputed that the accused could still tell the difference between right and wrong when she committed the horrendous act.'

He added that when she pushed Madam Wee out of the window, it was not done in the heat of their fight.

He pointed out: 'The fight was over and the opponent, as it were, was knocked out.'

He also said that the crime was committed in the very place that Madam Wee and her husband probably felt most secure - at home.

He added that Barokah's actions before and after the killing showed that she was 'quite collected' in her thought process, despite her depression.

He said: 'In my opinion, what the accused had done showed her to be a dangerous person especially when her livelihood was at stake, even when she was in the wrong, like she was that fateful morning when she sneaked out of the flat to meet her paramour.'

Barokah is appealing against the sentence.