

## **Jemma Mitchell**

### **Sentencing Remarks**

1. Jemma Mitchell, I have to sentence you for the murder on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2021 of Mee-Kuen, otherwise known as Deborah Chong (DC), of which you were convicted by the jury yesterday.
2. I have had regard to the victim impact statements read to the court from 2 members of her family who are not unnaturally in a state of shock and devastation as to the circumstances in which she met her death.
3. As has no doubt been explained to you by your counsel, the only sentence which the court can impose for murder is one of life imprisonment, but I am required to fix a minimum term which you must serve in any event before you would be eligible to be considered for parole.
4. Whether or not you will be released at the end of the minimum term will depend on the view taken by the parole board at that time as to whether you continue to represent a danger to other members of the public.
5. I am in no doubt whatsoever that this was a murder done for gain and as such, pursuant to Schedule 21 of the Sentencing Act 2020, the starting point must be one of 30 years imprisonment, a figure which falls to be adjusted according to the mitigating and aggravating features of the case, which is a topic to which I shall return.
6. You are now 38 years of age. You have one minor previous conviction for breach of a non molestation order, which arose in a domestic context. I propose to ignore that and to treat you as a woman of previous good character.
7. You are clearly a highly intelligent woman having obtained first class honours in 2006 in human sciences from Kings College, London, and then gone on to qualify as

an osteopath. You then went to live and work in Australia, returning to live here, with your mother, in 2015.

8. You lived together in a large property in North London and the 2 of you decided to add an upper floor to the house. This proved to be your undoing. You and your mother paid a total of £230,000 to 2 builders, one of whom evidently cheated you and you were thereby exhausted of a large part of your resources, but the work remained substantially unfinished and the house was left without a roof and covered in scaffolding.
9. Meanwhile, you met the victim in this case through the church. She, like you, was a very devout Christian and it is clear from the 100s of phone messages that passed between you over a period of several months right up to the time of her death that you became very close.
10. She was 67 years of age and of Malaysian origin. She was a woman of some means and the evidence showed that she was extremely generous. Unfortunately, she had a history of serious mental illness, having been diagnosed some years ago with schizophrenia and she had spent some months as an inpatient at a mental hospital. Shortly before you killed her, she had suffered a relapse and, against her will, had been put on anti-psychotic medication. As such, and as you well knew, she was particularly vulnerable, both mentally as well as physically; and the jury saw from the CCTV evidence how, in the days before her death, she walked with difficulty, needing to hold on to the arm of her lodger.
11. The messages that passed between the 2 of you showed that she was very well aware of your problems with regard to the house and was proactive in attempting to help you. This culminated in her offering to give you £200,000 to spend on the house, an

offer, however, which she withdrew a few days before you killed her, which I am sure is what led you to do what you did.

12. On the morning of 11<sup>th</sup> June 2021 you set off early from your home address, taking with you a large suitcase which, it was evident from the CCTV, was either empty or had very little in it. You went by public transport to her address and you stayed there for over 5 hours.
13. When you emerged from the property it was clear from the CCTV evidence that you had injured your hand. I am satisfied that can only have happened whilst you were inside the house and must have occurred in the course of the killing. Later that evening you attended St Thomas hospital where you were treated for a fractured finger. You claimed that it had occurred when you trapped it in a car door. That was clearly a lie. The suitcase that you had taken to the house was now very obviously full and heavy. You also now had with you another case. I am sure that this other case was the one that the police later recovered from your home. It belonged to DC and it contained many documents that belonged to her, including her passport, driving licence, naturalisation papers, bank, credit and other loyalty cards.
14. That large suitcase contained DC's body. I have no doubt that you had killed her whilst you were at her house and, absent any explanation from you, given that you went no comment throughout your police interviews and did not go into the witness box, I am driven to the conclusion that you went to her house that morning with that intention in mind.
15. 2 weeks later you hired a car for 1 day only. You were seen to put that large suitcase into the hire car. It is clear from the CCTV that it was heavy, such that you needed a trolley to wheel it down the road and into the car. That is because it contained DC's body.

16. You then drove down to Devon where you clearly planned to dump her body but your plans went awry when you had a puncture which had to be attended to by the AA.  
This meant that you had rather less time down there to find a place to secrete the body than you had envisaged, hence why you were unable to find a more remote location than you did.
17. The place that you alighted upon was at the bottom of some steps on a public footpath by some woodland adjacent to Bennett Road in Salcombe. A telling piece of evidence against you was that the fact that that evening your hire car was seen being driven on Bennett Road 50 metres away from where DC's body was found the following afternoon by a lady who was out walking.
18. That grim discovery was made all the worse by the fact that her head had been cut off. It was not found until a number of days later, some 10 metres from the body, further down the hill beneath some undergrowth.
19. Because of the extent of decomposition of the body the pathologist who carried out the autopsy was unable to ascertain the cause of death but what was found was that she had suffered a comminuted fracture to the skull as well as multiple rib fractures.
20. As part of your degree you were taught anatomy and you included on your website which advertised your services as an osteopath the fact that you had experience in the dissection of human bodies. That no doubt stood you in good stead when you cut off her head, although why you chose to do that remains a mystery.
21. Following your arrest on 6<sup>th</sup> July, amongst the items found by the police at your home was a will which purported to be that of DC and to leave 95% of her assets to you and the remaining 5% to your mother. That will was fake, it was written by you and it contained signatures of DC and 2 witnesses all of which were forgeries.

22. One of the persons whose signature you forged was that of Virgil Gheorghita an erstwhile neighbour of yours who had died some months earlier. Following his death you had managed to gain access to his room and you took from that room various papers of his, including his passport as well as his phone.
23. A short time later you rang the phone company, pretending to be him, giving his name and date of birth and had the phone reactivated. It was his phone, rather than yours that you used to book the hire car and it was his phone that you took with you on the trip to Devon, leaving your own at home.
24. Moreover the evidence of the handwriting expert was that his purported signature on the will had been copied from his passport that you had removed from his room.
25. Quite apart from anything else I am driven to the conclusion that you are extremely devious.
26. I said at the outset of these remarks that I would return to the issue of the mitigating and aggravating features of your case.
27. The sole mitigation is that you are effectively a woman of previous good character, although given the gravity of your crime, in my judgment that entitles you to only a very modest discount.
28. As to aggravating features, there are the following:
  - a) the planning and premeditation, although it is right to acknowledge that that is bound to be an invariable feature of a killing done for gain;
  - b) there is the issue of DC's mental and physical vulnerability, to which I have already referred and of which you were well aware.
  - c) there is the chilling aspect of what you did to and with her body after you had killed her.

29. You have shown absolutely no remorse and it appears that you are in complete denial as to what you did, notwithstanding what in my judgment amounted to overwhelming evidence against you.
30. The enormity of your crime is profoundly shocking, even more so given your apparent religious devotion as well as the fact that DC was a good friend to you and had shown you great kindness.
31. The sentence of the court is one of life imprisonment and the minimum term of imprisonment that you will in any event be required to serve will be 34 years.
32. There will be deducted from that term the days that you have spent in custody on remand.
33. The statutory surcharge will apply.