

The Electric New Paper :

HUSBAND ASKS: WHY SO HEARTLESS?

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By Hedy Khoo

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IT was a minor collision between a BMW and a Mercedes-Benz. But it led to a car chase, screaming rage from one driver and the death of the other after a stroke.

The Mercedes driver, who is believed to be around 20 years old, allegedly shouted vulgarities, and he insisted on being compensated even as the BMW driver, Madam Lee Bee Hua, 56, was being carried on a stretcher into an ambulance.

She died from a brain haemorrhage two weeks later.

The damage to the cars? One broken wing mirror each.

Madam Lee's family has lodged a police report.

Police said they are looking into the matter.

The collision took place around 8 pm on 22 Apr, and it is not clear if either car stopped immediately.

According to Madam Lee's family, the Mercedes driver chased Madam Lee's car through Lentor estate, off Yio Chu Kang Road, for at least half a kilometre.

She finally reached her house on Lentor Street and stopped, sounding her horn.

Her son-in-law, Mr Edwin Han, 36, a sales manager, rushed out and saw her seated in her car, with the young man standing close by.

Said Mr Han: 'I opened her car door and asked if she was okay, but she could not really speak.'

Mr Han said his mother-in-law appeared to be confused, frightened and unable to get out on her own.

During this time, the other driver allegedly kept yelling that 'she knocked my car'.

'I carried my mother-in-law out of the car and into the house, but he didn't stop shouting,' said Mr Han.

As Madam Lee's two daughters attended to their mother, Mr Han went out again to find out what had happened.

'He had been making such a din outside our house that the neighbours started to come out,' said Mr Han.

'He kept shouting that my mother-in-law was drunk. I told him my mother-in-law is 56 years old and she doesn't drink, but he refused to listen.'

Mr Han looked at the man's Mercedes, and saw that only its right mirror was damaged, and offered to pay for the damage.

He then wanted to return to the house to check on his mother-in-law.

'He shouted repeatedly 'You don't move. You stand here.' I had to ignore him, because my first priority was to help my mother-in-law,' said Mr Han.

'But as I walked away, he used a foul word on me, and started to shout vulgarities.'

Inside, Madam Lee's daughters were trying to help their mother.

Said the elder daughter, Ms Jaime Wee, 31, a senior manager in real estate: 'My sister and I were shocked to see my mum slumped over on the sofa. She was pale and trembling. I kept asking how she felt and what was wrong.

'I had no idea what had happened as my mother couldn't tell us.'

Ms Wee said her mother, who worked as a human resource specialist, was on her way home from her office in Jurong after stopping to buy dinner for the family.

As her condition did not improve, her younger daughter, Miss Johlin Wee, 21, a marketing co-ordinator, said they decided to call for an ambulance.

The ambulance arrived and paramedics rushed to Madam Lee's aid within 15 minutes, but the Mercedes driver

was allegedly still shouting outside the house.

'While the paramedics were attending to our mother, we could hear him shouting, but we didn't pay attention because we were in a panic over our mum,' said Ms Wee.

Outside, neighbours had emerged from their houses.

One of them, Madam Margaret Goh, 43, claimed: 'The Mercedes driver was very agitated and kept screaming at the top of his voice.

'We came out to try to mediate. Edwin wanted to go in to help his mother-in-law but the driver kept shouting and wouldn't let him go.'

Madam Goh said she and her husband tried to placate the young man.

'He told me that the BMW had been swerving left and right along the road and hit his car,' she said.

'He also said he had chased the BMW to see where the drunk driver lived.'

She said the man kept insisting that the driver was drunk.

Madam Goh added: 'I told the young man that even if my neighbour had hit his car, the accident was only a minor one. Moreover, she was ill. It was not necessary for him to get so worked up.

'But once the ambulance drove off, he started shouting again and even as the family were trying to get into their car to go to the hospital, he kept shouting that they must stay and settle the matter.'

Later, at the hospital, Madam Lee's family was informed that she had suffered a stroke, and had a brain haemorrhage.

Madam Lee, who had a history of hypertension, had been on medication and had regular check-ups.

They said that after her last check-up on 7 Apr, the doctor had told them Madam Lee's blood pressure was within the normal range.

Dr Ivan Ng, 42, senior consultant and head of the Neurosurgery Department of the National Neuroscience Institute, who was one of the doctors overseeing Madam Lee's case, said her stroke led to bleeding in the brain as a result of burst bloodvessels.

Madam Lee went through a minor procedure to drain fluid from the brain and monitor the brain pressure.

But Dr Ng said the blood clot in her brain was large and had destroyed critical parts of her brain. Surgery to remove it was not possible.

He explained that regular medication for patients with high blood pressure only lowers their risk of having a stroke.

Said Dr Ng: 'It is difficult to determine exactly at which point Madam Lee had the stroke.

'However, if she had a stroke at the point of the accident, it is unlikely that she would have been able to drive back.'

He explained: 'Driving requires complex hand, eye and feet co-ordination. A stroke patient wouldn't be able to drive in most cases.'

Dr Ng said one of the triggering points of a stroke is severe stress, especially for patients with high blood pressure.

'Stress may have triggered the stroke, and the sequence of events would have exacerbated the situation.

'Continuing stress would worsen the high blood pressure and exacerbate the bleeding in the brain,' he said.

Madam Lee was admitted to the intensive care unit. But she never regained consciousness and died on 6 May.

Her husband, Mr William Wee, 58, a businessman, was away in Vietnam on a business trip.

But he could return only two days after the accident, on the earliest flight on which he could get a ticket.

He took the news of her sudden hospitalisation and death very badly as he was very close to his wife.

Said Ms Wee: 'My father would take my mum for breakfast and take her to and from work every day if he wasn't travelling.'

Mr Wee said the last time he saw his wife was on the morning of 21 Apr.

'I was rushing to catch my flight to Vietnam, and she jokingly asked me for a kiss.

'I said no to her in jest, that I would only kiss her when I returned home. I didn't even have one last chance to say goodbye to her.'

Mr Wee added: 'No matter what caused the accident, my wife didn't deserve to be treated that way... His behaviour was barbaric and heartless. He showed absolutely no compassion.'

DISCREPANCIES IN REPAIR BILL

THE Mercedes driver demanded \$3,000 as compensation for a broken side mirror, and allegedly also submitted a fake invoice to claim \$400 for car rental.

Mr Edwin Han said the man had called him about compensation for the mirror the day after the accident.

But Mr Han did not pay, and asked that the Mercedes be fixed at Cycle & Carriage instead. The bill came to around \$1,300, he said, less than half of what was asked for.

Mr Han said he had also paid \$400 for 'car rental' without negotiating, as he was worried about his mother-in-law.

But when he looked at the invoice later, he became suspicious as it only had a car workshop's letterhead and no details such as a signature or the name of the person who rented the car.

'I called up the company that issued the invoice, and a woman who answered said they were a workshop, and didn't provide car rental services,' Mr Han claimed.

Mr Han immediately lodged a police report, on 29 Apr.

On learning about the matter, Madam Lee's husband was very upset and called the brother of the Mercedes driver and asked for a meeting at the hospital.

According to Mr Wee, the brother of the driver came alone, and apologised.

He begged him to let his younger brother off, saying he was young, and still serving his national service,' claimed Mr Wee.

'I told him I would not let the matter rest if my wife were to die,' he added.

Said Mr Wee: 'My wife has 35 years of driving experience and she is a cautious driver who doesn't believe in speeding.

'The damage to his car was not major. It did not warrant such aggressive behaviour.

'We have compensated him for his damage. Now, who is going to compensate me for my wife?'

When The New Paper on Sunday contacted the brother of the driver, both he and his brother declined to be interviewed.