

Model and mother jailed for £1.2m property scam

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/model-and-mother-jailed-for-1-2m-property-scam-k62rhk22t>

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Laylah De Cruz persuaded her mother to pose as a millionaires
METROPOLITAN POLICE/PA

A model who persuaded her mother to pose as a 91-year-old millionairess and change her name by deed poll as part of a £1.2 million property fraud was jailed for five years yesterday.

Laylah De Cruz, 31, also told her mother, Dianne Moorcroft, 62, to obtain a British passport and Dubai resident's permit in the name of Margaret Gwenllian Richards, who has since died.

The pair convinced estate agents and solicitors that Moorcroft was the owner of Ms Richards' vacant £3 million home in Kensington, west London, in 2014.

De Cruz, who is based in Dubai, then helped to secure a £1.2 million bridging loan against the three-bedroom property before a buyer was found. The money was transferred to the United Arab Emirates and withdrawn in cash from bank accounts in the dead woman's name.

Teresa Hay, for the prosecution, said: "Both defendants were convicted of a single count of conspiracy to commit fraud by false representation in respect of a property at 5 Eagle Place in Kensington.

"It was owned by a lady called Margaret Gwenllian Richards and the fraud was perpetrated by Miss Moorcroft at the invitation of Miss De Cruz and others, changing her name by deed poll and applying for legal identification documents in the name of the owner Margaret Gwenllian Richards and presenting herself to a solicitor in London as that lady."

De Cruz was jailed for five years yesterday, while Moorcroft was sent to prison for three years. Both had been convicted at Southwark crown court in January.

De Cruz had encouraged her mother to take part in the scam after being “dazzled” by her friend Karl Cronin, 50, who did not stand trial and remains at large.

The court was told that Moorcroft had travelled to London from her £80,000 home in Blackpool, Lancashire, and had convinced Tim Cope, a property lawyer, that she owned the house. He acted as a solicitor in the sale while the real Ms Richards was staying in Cambridge.

The fraudsters sent him an email applying for a loan against the property before a buyer could be found and he negotiated a £1.2 million offer through a bridging loan company.

Miss Hay added: “Thereafter it was discovered it was indeed a fraud, by which time a loan of £1.2 million had been forwarded, minus legal costs, to an account in the name of Margaret Gwenllian Richards in Dubai.”

Moorcroft travelled to Dubai three times to open bank accounts to receive the money so that Mr Cronin could withdraw it.

An investigation was launched in October 2014 by the Metropolitan Police after the Land Registry reported suspicious activity around the Kensington property.

Moorcroft was arrested in February 2015 at her home in Blackpool, while De Cruz was arrested as she entered Britain from Dubai in May 2016.

Detective Constable Richard Kirk, of the Met’s Operation Falcon, said: “As these women conducted this devious fraud, it is clear that it didn’t occur to them that official agencies would be able to see through their scheme and this was their undoing. Although the wider investigation to trace additional members of the network is [continuing], it is clear that De Cruz and Moorcroft played key roles in this crime.

“The proceeds of this fraud have never been recovered.”

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Herts and Spades Mar 18, 2017

HSBC gave money (£25,000) from our joint account to fraudsters impersonating us in several branches. All the fraudsters showed was a fake driving licence and gave a convincing story. On one occasion a French driving licence was shown. The bank advised us not to close our account as it was ok now. I emptied the account but the next day the bank helpfully, at the request of the fraudsters, transferred money from our savings account to the now empty account so that the fraudsters could withdraw more funds. All funds were repaid to us but the bank suffered the loss. They never gave us feedback or an explanation.

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LAW Mar 18, 2017

"... De Cruz, who is based in Dubai ..."

Is or was?

She WAS based in Dubai but is now in a British prison.

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Christine elsen palmer Mar 18, 2017

Not surprised that frauds can happen in the UK. When I lived there I was flabbergasted when asked, by bank clerk to bring in some utilitybills to prove to the bank who I am!!!! But at this scale...who is to blame?

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EnglishRose Mar 18, 2017

So the property was never sold but a loan was granted on it of £1.2m charged on the house. Presumably the lender cannot enforce the charge over the home. So the estate of the now dead owner can benefit fully (and the state in terms of inheritance tax too) but the loser of the £1.2m is the lender? Or can the lender say the charge was valid and sue the solicitor for not doing enough checks? Or can the lender enforce the charge and the lady's estate bears the loss?

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Chris Huckle Mar 18, 2017

Interesting questions diverting attention from the real fraudster here ,HMRC taking £1 million in IHT.....and it's doing it every day!

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Ann Lyon Mar 18, 2017

Good to see that this fraud was spotted by the Land Registry, demonstrating that official bodies can notice something that is not quite right.

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