

WOMAN ACQUITTED OF FELONIES HER LAWYER IS RELIEVED; VICTIM'S FAMILY DISTRAUGHT

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A Charlottesville Circuit Court jury acquitted Valentina Djelebova of first-degree murder, robbery and use of a firearm in a felony yesterday in the Sept. 27 killing of a Charlottesville jeweler.

The jury found the 41-year-old Djelebova guilty of being an accessory after the fact to the robbery of George Moody for her role in assisting companion Dorian Lester. Lester was convicted of capital murder, robbery and use of a firearm in a felony in April.

The jury also acquitted her of charges of being an accessory after the fact to the murder and use of a firearm. Djelebova was sentenced to the maximum 12 months in jail and a \$2,500 fine on the misdemeanor accessory charge, which the jury had recommended. She had faced life in prison on the felony murder and robbery charges.

Compared with the jeopardy she faced, her lawyer said, the verdict was a tremendous relief.

"We are very relieved that the jury in this particular jurisdiction that had been exposed to such great negative publicity {against Djelebova} was able to rise above it and decide the case on the facts presented," said John Zwerling.

It was a long, emotional day for Moody's family. They waited around the courthouse as the jury, which got the case Tuesday, deliberated until 4:45 p.m. As the verdicts were read, several family members wept and were clearly distraught.

After jurors were dismissed and the trial adjourned, Moody's sister, Susan Butts, screamed as she left the courtroom.

"She killed my brother!" she yelled while looking at Djelebova. "You witch! She got away with it!"

Butts was escorted outside the courthouse by family and friends, where she sat on a chair smoking a cigarette, her hand trembling.

"If the jury had been awake, they would have found that ... guilty," she said.

Moody's mother, Mary, was also noticeably upset.

"I hope someone kills her," she said, referring to Djelebova. "I hope someone shoots her."

After having a few minutes to cool down, Butts and Mrs. Moody spoke with reporters. They both said they strongly believe Djelebova deserved to spend the rest of her life in prison for her role in the crime.

"I know she was there," Butts said. "She knows she was there. Unfortunately the jury didn't agree with us."

Mrs. Moody said she could not understand why the jury let Djelebova off.

"My son was only 53 years old and he was one of the nicest men who ever lived," she said.

The victim's family said they hold out hope Djelebova will be convicted of grand larceny, a charge she has yet to be tried on. She faces up to 20 years in prison on that charge.

Reaction was muted from Charlottesville law enforcement and prosecutors. Commonwealth's Attorney Dave Chapman said he believes the maximum penalties for being an accessory after the fact to a felony crime need to be looked at.

A trial date for Djelebova's grand larceny charge has not been set. She was expected to post bond last night and be free pending an appeal.

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