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Guilty Verdict for Man Who Raped and Murdered Ex-Fiancée in Surrey Hotel After 'Farewell' Dinner

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A man has been found guilty of raping and murdering his ex-fiancée at a five-star Surrey hotel after luring her into a dinner under the guise of a final birthday farewell. James Cartwright, 61, was convicted by a jury at Guildford Crown Court on Tuesday following the death of 54-year-old Samantha Mickleburgh, a mother of two, at Pennyhill Park Hotel in Bagshot on 14 April 2023.

Cartwright, who had invited Samantha to the luxury hotel to mark his 60th birthday, was found guilty of both murder and rape. He was acquitted of a separate charge of controlling or coercive behaviour.

The court heard that the couple had embarked on a brief but intense relationship beginning in 2022, with an engagement soon after. However, their relationship deteriorated, and they separated in early 2023. Despite the split, Cartwright continued contacting Samantha persistently, often showing up at her home without warning and calling her repeatedly.

Prosecutor Louise Oakley told the jury that although Samantha no longer wished to be in a relationship, she agreed to join Cartwright for his birthday as an act of compassion, believing he had no one else. "She didn't wish him any ill," Oakley said. "But part of her also felt bad for him."

As part of the evening, the pair dined at the hotel's Michelin-starred Latymer restaurant, sharing a six-course tasting menu. Hotel staff noted that Samantha appeared increasingly drowsy throughout the meal and, at times, looked as though she had fallen asleep. CCTV footage later showed the couple returning to their room around 10.30pm. That was the last time Samantha was seen alive.

The following morning, Cartwright called emergency services shortly after 8.30am, claiming he had awoken to find Samantha dead beside him. He told police they had shared a consensual encounter before falling asleep "in each other's arms".

However, a post-mortem revealed a different story. Samantha had suffered a serious head injury and fractures to her neck bones, injuries consistent with strangulation. Further testimony revealed that, in the lead-up to the evening, Cartwright had sent messages to a woman he met on the dating app Bumble, referring to the dinner with his ex as having "the feel of a final goodbye" and describing it ominously as "the last goodbye".

The court was also told that Cartwright had lent Samantha tens of thousands of pounds to help with renovations on a property she had purchased, later claiming she owed him around £100,000.

Cartwright has been remanded in custody and will be sentenced on 8 August.