



[Serafima Meshaka]

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Man who stole money from woman he murdered jailed for at least 30 years

A man has been jailed for murdering a woman in an attempt to save himself from a substantial amount of debt by stealing from her.

Armen Aristakesyan, 43 (29.08.78) of Uxbridge Road, W13, was found guilty following a nine-week trial at the Old Bailey on Wednesday, 13 October.

He was sentenced to life with a minimum of 30 years' imprisonment after attacking Serafima Meshaka, who was aged 58, in her Ealing home.

The court heard that Aristakesyan was a friend of Serafima's who had grown closer to her in recent months in order to gain her trust.

Police were called on Wednesday, 18 September 2019 to Serafima's address at a block in Haven Green Court, W5, after concerns for her welfare were raised for the welfare of a woman.

Serafima was found lying face down in the bathroom of her third floor apartment at around 13:25hrs and was pronounced dead a short time later.

A crime scene was put in place. There were no signs of any forced entry or disturbance.

Officers noted an injury to the back of Serafima's head and contacted colleagues from the Specialist Crime Command.

A special post-mortem examination carried out on 23 September 2019 deemed the cause of death as severe and multiple blunt trauma to the head.

Ms Meshaka kept a quantity of cash at her home address. The court heard that she had been having extensive building work carried out and would often pay for this using cash. It was suggested by the prosecution that Aristakesyan knew she kept this money at home and planned to steal it from her to resolve his financial difficulties, after growing increasingly desperate when his payment deadline was approaching.

Detectives retrieved CCTV showing Serafima leaving the communal entrance of the block at 19:50hrs on 17 September to get a parking permit from a friend's car. She returned alone a few minutes later.

At 20:25hrs that same evening, Aristakesyan arrived at Haven Green Court. He had also attended earlier that evening at approximately 17:40hrs in what the prosecution say was a failed attempt to carry out his crime because the building workers had still been present.

On this later occasion he was seen to be in possession of a small man bag on arrival, however when he left at 21:21hrs he was pictured carrying a bigger 'bag for life'-type carrier bag in which it is suspected he carried the stolen cash and murder weapon.

Phone enquiries established that Aristakesyan had communicated with his brother through brief calls and texts whilst inside the address. In one such call which was recorded and played in evidence to the court he can be heard saying: “Come, there is much”.

The court also heard transcripts of other phone calls dating back to February 2019 that the defendant had recorded on his mobile phone and which suggested he was in significant debt to a male called “The Turk”.

During interview Aristakesyan accepted that he had been to visit Serafima that night but told police that he had left her alive and following his visit to her he had gone with his brother to a relative’s home before going on to meet another man in Victoria, supposedly for a discussion about buying a care home business. He claimed the bag he is seen carrying on CCTV contained items Ms Meshaka had given him to take to a charity shop.

It is accepted that Arisakesyan’s brother facilitated his leaving from near to the scene and his transport to Victoria for the meeting in which the prosecution say, he handed over the stolen cash.

Arisakesyan’s brother was originally arrested and charged with assisting an offender however the case against him was later discontinued by the CPS.

Aristakesyan was known to be in deep financial difficulties after owing approximately £120,000 to illegal loan sharks.

Detective Superintendent Helen Rance, from the Specialist Crime Command, said: “Serafima was going about her life as normal on the evening she died. She had run some small errands and prepared herself a dinner when Aristakesyan called at her address for the second time that day. Having known him for around three years she had no reason to suspect that she was in danger.

“However in the brief course of his visit he succeeded in his calculated pre-planned course of events to steal a substantial amount of cash from her in order to bail himself out of his financial worries.

“Serafima was no threat at all to Aristakesyan but he betrayed her confidence and attacked her in her own home, her safe space, in the most cowardly way.

Her family remain devastated and are still coming to terms with her untimely loss.”

A victim impact statement from Serafima's former husband said: "Nothing will bring my wife back, no sentence this man can get for this horrific crime would ever be enough. She was a wonderful person whom will forever be greatly missed."