

NY Woman Accused in Identity Theft Case

February 08, 2011

The  Moscow Times

NEW YORK — The wife of a man accused of hatching a deadly identity theft scheme pleaded guilty Monday to using a missing translator's credit card to go on a shopping spree.

Julia Yakovlev entered the plea in federal court in Brooklyn, where she had been scheduled to go on trial next week with her husband. She faces a minimum of two years behind bars for credit card fraud and identity theft at her sentencing, which is scheduled for May 6.

Yakovlev, 37, answered several yes-or-no questions from the judge through a Russian interpreter but wasn't required to elaborate on her crimes. Afterward, she declined to speak to reporters.

The case stems from the disappearance of Irina Malezhik, 47, a Russian-language translator for federal courts. She was last seen on Oct. 15, 2007, when a security camera recorded her leaving her apartment building.

Investigators found no sign that the Ukrainian-born woman left the country. But as time

passed, they said they discovered evidence that she was a victim of an identity theft scam involving tens of thousands of dollars.

Checks with the missing woman's forged signatures were deposited into the account of the Yakovlevs around the time of her disappearance, according to a criminal complaint unsealed in 2009. Within the same week, authorities claim, the couple obtained a credit card in Malezhik's name, then used it to make cash withdrawals from ATMs and buy Franck Muller watches and other expensive items at clothing and jewelry stores in Brooklyn and elsewhere — purchases confirmed by shopkeepers and surveillance cameras.

Following their arrests on bank fraud and credit card theft, Dmitriy Yakovlev was jailed without bail, while Julia Yakovlev was released on \$500,000 bond and allowed to return home to their two small children.

Federal prosecutors later added murder charges against the husband. He has pleaded not guilty to all charges and has denied the allegations through his lawyer.

The new indictment followed an FBI search of the couple's two-story home in Brooklyn based on a tip that Malezhik's remains may have been buried in the basement. Though no body parts turned up, agents "found a clump of long, brown-colored hair which appeared to them to be consistent with what was known of the length and color of the hair of [the victim]," court papers said.

Testifying at a pretrial hearing, an FBI agent said investigators also discovered women's underwear that tested positive for Malezhik's DNA.

Dmitriy Yakovlev also has pleaded not guilty in the slaying of a New Jersey jewelry importer whose mutilated body was found in the woods in black plastic garbage bags in 2006.

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