

Woman Arrested for Stealing Guide Dog Declares Hunger Strike

By [Daria Litvinova](#)

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A stolen guide dog drama that seized Muscovites' imagination two weeks ago is far from over.

On Monday, Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin announced via Twitter that the woman allegedly responsible for stealing the guide dog from its blind owner had been detained and was being kept in a pretrial detention center.

On Tuesday, the suspect — Viktoria Pavlenko — said she was going on hunger strike in protest at being unfairly accused. She says she simply took a dog that appeared to have got lost to an animal shelter, the Yod news website reported Tuesday.

The dog, a golden labrador named Diana that belongs to a blind singer, Yulia Dyakova, was reportedly stolen at about 6 p.m. on July 29 outside Papa Carlo, a pet store near Profsoyuznaya metro station in the city's south.

Appeals to find the dog and punish the thief quickly spread through social networks and

attracted public attention, making the case high-profile enough for the Investigative Committee to step in, Markin said in an official statement published on the committee's website.

“We will do everything to return your loyal friend and helper to you,” he vowed to Dyakova via Twitter on July 31.

The dog was found last week at a shelter in the satellite town of Domodedovo, the Gazeta.ru news site reported, citing local police. It was then returned to its owner, and several days later the Investigative Committee claimed it had found the person responsible for abducting Diana.

But Pavlenko, who claims to be a volunteer for one of the dog shelters, denied the allegations. A day before she was arrested, she put forward her side of the story on her Facebook page, saying she had found a dog that was obviously lost and had taken it to a shelter as she always does in such cases.

According to her lawyer, she then went to the police voluntarily to make a statement, but was arrested upon her arrival, Yod reported.

Contact the author at d.litvinova@imedia.ru

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