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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Missing U.S. Student Found Dead in Russia, Suspected Killer Arrested

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Catherine Serou, 34, a former Marine, disappeared after getting into a car with a stranger. **Courtesy of Beccy Serou via NPR**

Russian police have found the body of U.S. citizen Catherine Serou after she went missing in the city of Nizhny Novgorod 400 kilometers east of Moscow, investigators announced Saturday.

Serou, 34, a master's student at Lobachevsky University and a former Marine, disappeared Tuesday evening after getting into an unidentified vehicle outside her residence in Nizhny Novgorod's Bor suburb. Her mother Beccy Serou told NPR that her last message from her daughter read: "In a car with a stranger. I hope I'm not being abducted."

A search-and-rescue team involving more than 100 volunteers found Serou's body on Saturday morning after two days of combing the forests north of the Bor district.

Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said it found the "missing foreign student" and has arrested an unnamed 44-year-old man suspected of her murder. If

convicted, the suspect faces up to 15 years in prison on criminal murder charges.

The U.S. Embassy in Moscow confirmed the woman's death, when contacted by AFP, and said it was "closely following" the Russian authorities' enquiry.

Beccy Serou told NPR on Friday that her daughter, in a rush to get back to a clinic where she had made a payment that didn't go through, could have gotten into a passing car without waiting for her Uber.

"I think that when she saw that the person wasn't driving to the clinic, but instead was driving into a forest, she panicked," Beccy Serou said. "Her telephone last pinged off a cell tower in that forest."

Catherine Serou held a bachelor's degree in design and a master's degree in art history from the University of California, Davis. She previously served in the Marines and did one tour in Afghanistan.

Beccy Serou, who as of Friday hadn't given up hope that her daughter was alive, said Catherine wanted to study Russian before applying to law school in the United States, and had plans to become an immigration lawyer.

"She loved the university," she told NPR. "I'm not going to use the past tense, I'm sorry for doing that. She loves the university. It has very small classes, extremely good teachers and she had many friends outside the university as well."

AFP contributed reporting.

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