

INVESTIGATORS NOW SUSPECT FOUL PLAY \

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Sheriff's deputies attended the funeral of Jack Barnett on Wednesday, hoping the suicide victim's girlfriend would show up and calm rising fears about her fate.

Theresa "Terry" Rideout, 36, didn't show up at Bradley's Colonial Chapel in Boonville, Ind., and investigators said they now have increased suspicion that she may have been killed.

She has been missing since Sept. 2 and has not picked up her paycheck at a local fast-food restaurant. Nothing other than her dog, River, is missing from the home she shared with Barnett in Chandler, Ind.

Barnett was found dead on Sept. 10 in the Four Seasons Motel in Posey County. The Courier on Wednesday incorrectly reported the day Barnett's body was discovered.

Warrick County Sheriff Jeff Gore, who asked the Indiana State Police for assistance with the case Wednesday, said Ms. Rideout's disappearance and her boyfriend's suicide lead investigators to fear the worst.

He is not ruling out the possibility that Ms. Rideout just left. But he said that is unlikely, considering she didn't show up at the funeral.

There was speculation Barnett may have had something to do with Ms. Rideout's disappearance. "But there was no indication of a stormy relationship ...," Gore said.

Detective Marvin Heilman, who is now leading the investigation, said he, too, fears foul play.

"That's certainly what we're most concerned about," he said. "There are a lot of indications of foul play or suspicious activity. It's certainly not normal."

She did not have access to a vehicle; her car was broken. And Barnett had driven his pickup truck to the motel.

"It kind of looks like we might have a bad situation here," Heilman said. "But we don't know what that would be. We suspect foul play."

Barnett worked in Posey County at Southern Indiana Gas and Electric Co.'s A.B. Brown Power Plant in West Franklin. But it was unclear on Wednesday whether he had worked there on the same day he checked into the motel.

Posey County Sheriff Bill Cox said he is convinced Barnett's death was a suicide. The chain to the motel-room door was locked, he said, meaning no one could have gotten out without removing the chain.

Hotel workers called the Sheriff's Department on Saturday afternoon after they tried to gain access to the room around 4:30 p.m. Barnett had not checked out and had hung a "do not disturb" sign on the door.

Hotel employees unlocked the door, opened it as far as the chain would allow, then saw blood, Cox said.

Posey County Coroner Ted Moore said Barnett left a "personal note" for his 13-year-old daughter, but it did not mention anything about Ms. Rideout.

"He told her to grow up to be a good girl and that he loved her."

Members of Barnett's family declined comment.

Despite the suspicions of law enforcement officers, Ms. Rideout's friends were not giving up hope. But their fears were rising.

Carl Smith of Newburgh has been looking for Ms. Rideout since her disappearance. He has been friends with her, he said, for about eight years.

"If she was in trouble, she would come over and tell me about it," he said. "We were just really good friends. I probably knew as much about her private life as anyone."

But he said she did not keep in close contact with her small family.

He and others described Ms. Rideout as someone who was independent and didn't like to rely on people until she knew them well.

Heilman said he had not been able to reach any family members and that he was only told that she once lived in Phoenix, and had a sister in Indianapolis and an aunt in Kentucky.

"She maybe would leave on the spur of the moment, for a trip or something," Smith said. "But not without letting someone know. It's not like her and the dog to both be gone.

"No method of transportation, no belongings, it doesn't add up."

Cheri Ellis is another friend. They used to go to various bars in Warrick County together, she said.

"She seemed real happy," she said. "She's been on her own since she was pretty young. She's a very independent person. She didn't rely on anybody a whole lot."

Gail Chapman, a former roommate of Ms. Rideout, said she's always feared the worse. But the fact that she didn't show up at Barnett's funeral made her heart sink all the more.

"If she would have known he was dead, she would have shown up at the funeral," she said. "That's the kind of person she is."

Caption:

Photo (Color)

Theresa "Terry" Rideout

Memo: Staff writer Amy Happe contributed to this report.

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