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Wanted: 3/XII

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There are some things that are etched permanently into the journey when you go from metro station Ploshchad Revolyutsii to Teatralnaya.

As you creak up the steep tunnel that leads from Ploshchad Revolyutsii to Teatralnaya, there will be the trumpet player who leans against the right-hand wall, his cheeks bulging as he plays the same tune over and over again. One day he will have that trumpet pushed down his throat along with some notes for a new song, but for now he is a permanent fixture — just like the date "1946" that hangs on the arch at the end of the tunnel.

Down those stairs, and the choice is north to Mayakovskaya or south to Novokuznetskaya.

Take the right path and look to your left as you wait for a train to come. Look hard and you will see a faded piece of graffiti, waist high, that most have never have seen. Etched into the marble are the letters "A V," the date "3/XII" and the year "1959." Perhaps it is love struck teenagers Albert and Viktoria, Anna and Vadim, or even Adrian and Vernon — it doesn't say, although I suspect one of the first two is more likely.

Maybe somebody in their 70s or 80s still remembers that date and touches it each time they go past — like the shiny dogs' noses on the other side of the tunnel.

Of course, it could have been written much later, but the use of Roman

numerals for the month is the detail that convinces.

Some may tut at the vandalism of a fine piece of stone but, as some of the marble in the metro construction is said to have come from Christ the Savior Cathedral after it was blown up by the Bolsheviks, it seems a moot point.

There is a video on Hiphop.ru of modern-day graffiti artists who scale gates and crawl through tunnels to break into the metro's depots and spray doors and ceilings in loud colors that will really annoy early-morning commuters.

It looks dangerous, but scraping your love on a Teatralnaya wall — just six years after Stalin's death — impresses more.

Our risk-loving lovers began a trend, as that piece of marble has proved a regular spot for declarations throughout the ages. I suspect that it is because it is in the "last wagon as you leave the center" position, almost as much loved a meeting place as the "first wagon ..."

More noticeable than "1959" is a pair whose love is dated neatly from 1985, a pair perhaps inspired by the A and V's from more than a quarter of a century before.

Then the handwriting style slips noticeably as we reach the brash "2010," who simply writes the date, and the obviously trashed author of the "2011" that has been slashed rather than etched.

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