



“Escape” (Photo: Pinterest)

“Glance behind us and tell me what you see.”

Escape

“Glance behind us and tell me what you see,” he whispered. “But for God’s sake, be careful.” The young man and woman, both 20 years old, were two of Mother Russia’s top gymnasts. Some 15 minutes earlier they had emerged from Okhotny Ryad, the Red Square Metro station, and walked hand in hand to the Tomb of Lenin. From all outward appearances, there was little to differentiate them from hundreds of others visiting the tomb that day. Most were citizens of the USSR, though there also was a smattering of foreigners on holiday in the capital city. All were there either to simply view the casket or to pay their respects to Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, aka Lenin, founder of the Russian Communist Party and leader of the Bolshevik Revolution.

The fact was, our young couple’s visit to the tomb was meant as a distraction. Its real purpose was to give the couple a valid excuse for being in Red Square that day should someone—specifically, someone from the KGB—take an interest in them.

Annika turned slowly to her left and, resting her chin on Dimitri’s right shoulder, scanned the people behind them. Even though they and the others in line already had passed through the security checkpoint in Nikolskaya Tower within the Alexander Garden, she was well aware KGB agents were everywhere.

“What do you see?” hissed Dimitri impatiently.

“They’re here, all right, just like you said they would be,” Annika whispered into his ear. “There’s a huge bear of a man at the back of the line. He looks like a thug, dressed in one of those heavy, knee-length, black leather jackets. Right now, he’s going through the papers of an elderly couple for God knows what reason . . . not that there *has* to be a reason,” she said sarcastically.

“Okay. Now, slowly turn back to the front,” he said under his breath. “We don’t want anyone catching you staring at them. Act natural, and we’ll continue moving forward with the others. Give me a hug. Smile. This is easy. We’ll walk into and out of the tomb like everyone else and then, continue on to Saint Basil’s Cathedral. As far as anyone knows, we’re just a young couple in love, out for a walk and some sightseeing on an early September morning in Moscow.” He turned and kissed her on the cheek. “And if someone asks, we’ll tell them we’ll soon be leaving for the Summer Olympics in Tokyo and wanted to spend some time together in the city before the hard work begins.”

It was a short walk down a flight of stairs into the tomb, where a guard warned Dimitri to take his hands out of his pockets. Other guards kept them moving in a U-shape around the elaborate casket, where they showed the proper respect to Lenin, as would be expected. Within minutes they were back on the street, blinded by the light of the sun.

Dimitri glanced at his watch. “Come on! We don’t have much time.”

“Tell me again,” pleaded Annika, “who are we meeting at the cathedral?”

“That’s just it,” Dimitri replied. “I don’t know. And it’s not really a cathedral; it’s a museum. Inside we’ll find a maze of galleries leading from one chapel to the next. We’re supposed to run into a man dressed as a priest in the sanctuary dedicated to Saint Gregory the Illuminator of Armenia. He knows what I look like but I have no idea who he is or what he looks like other than, like I said, he’ll be dressed as a priest.”

“And then what’s supposed to happen?”

“He’s going to slip me a small piece of paper with a name and a telephone number written on it.”

“A name and telephone number?”

“Yes. It’s for the person we need to call in Tokyo after we give our handlers the slip . . . the person who will assist us in filing for political asylum and then, help us make our way to America!”