

I HAD A REAL SOFT SPOT FOR SOUTH STATION, a throw-back to the days when train stations got the same kind of respect that airports get now. Art nouveau metal bracing the vaulted ceiling, holding together the glass. Pink and green flowers so high up in the corners that the miniature drawings engraved on them were impossible to make out. Back then probably artisans still believed God could see their creations. Some of them were careful anyway, that's for sure. No freethinker could've come up with spirals like those, look how they all coil around each other. But then again, I thought, maybe it's some kind of Freemason symbolism. I was standing there following it up up up into infinity when suddenly, out of the darkness and mist of the cosmic tunnel I was happily tumbling into, the image of Jules Verne emerged. On one of my better days I had traded some idiot a carton of Gauloises for a daguerreotype of Jules Verne by Rondé. Afterwards the guy's older brother

just about killed him for being so stupid and they came to plead for it back, but I wouldn't budge an inch: a deal's a deal, even in bestial times.

The wooden doors on the restrooms were art nouveau too: the hinges with nymphs, the hasps and mountings, as big as about six of those particleboard slabs that pass for doors. As if they'd been built for men of gigantic stature. In fact it was like the entire train station had been built for some race now long extinct. If any of those Titans actually turned up here, the local riffraff would no doubt turn tail and head for the hills, and I wouldn't be far behind. But those consummate carpenters from the other end of the century left behind no holes in their work. I still wanted to go to the waiting room and admire the enormous tiled stove for a while. Back in the old days, the Red monsters had adorned the place with a Proletarian Corner and a Militiaman Stoika of Honor and I spent time there often in quiet meditation, the only visitor.

I fortified myself with a cup of coffee from the stand in front of the station, and just as the timepiece in my brain had returned to ticking tolerably I spotted a familiar face: Hey Mičinec! Mičinec had enough years on me to have taken me more than once: I'd traded him my father's watch for

some pieces of broken bottle, he'd slashed me with his skates over the Maškalířová girl, snapped my Little Bison bow in two, burned me with his lighter, ratted on me, accused me, and laid the blame on me for everything that ever got broken or stolen in the building where we lived with our families. But now our fathers had crumbled to dust and the remnants of our families were scattered throughout institutes, studio apartments and boneyards. That watch'd look pretty old-fashioned these days, and odds are that fetching red-haired creature had turned into a fiery old hag by now, so let bygones be bygones: How goes it, Mičinec? Sitting twisted up on a bench, he was grumbling something to himself, left hand pressed to his side. He turned my way, eyes pure panic, then threw his head skyward, tensed up, and fell silent. His hand slid from the bench, his side was covered in blood.