

Plot summary

Childhood and the Birth of the Factory of Good (Introductory Episode)

The story is framed by scenes from the childhood of Václav Havel (Vašek) in 1946. Young Václav and his brother Ivan dream of founding a "Factory of Good" (Továrna Dobrovka) that would produce goodness for everyone. This idealistic childhood dream is contrasted with the later reality.

Dissident Activities and the Play "About Beer and State Security"

The scene shifts to adulthood, where Havel and his wife Olga host a gathering of friends. Havel has just finished a new one-act play, which, according to him, is “about beer and about State Security (StB)”. The group of friends, including Pavel Landovský (Landák) and other dissident figures, discuss their anti-regime activities while under constant surveillance by the State Security (StB), which monitors their home.

The Underground Trial and the Creation of Charter 77

Havel learns about the arrest of members of the band The Plastic People of the Universe and others from the underground. Although he barely knows them personally, he feels a moral obligation to act. He realizes that condemning musicians “for their music” could lead to condemning “every artist for his novel, poem, or picture”. This leads him to the idea of a petition.

A scene from the court trial follows, where Ivan Jirous, Pavel Zajíček, Svatopluk Karásek, and Vratislav Brabenec are sentenced. Havel and his friends subsequently meet to discuss their next step. The petition they create calls on the government to observe human rights, to which it committed in the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference. Landovský warns him that they are heading for trouble.

Havel's First Imprisonment and Moral Crisis (1977)

The attempt to deliver the document turns into a grotesque chase with the StB. Havel is arrested on suspicion of the criminal offense of subversion of the republic.

In prison, Havel is interrogated, surrounded by representatives of the repressive apparatus. His interrogator has Mephistophelian features. Havel, devastated and depressed, is overwhelmed by an inner, devilish temptation. In April 1977, he writes a letter to the General Prosecutor, in which he offers his binding promise that if released, he will refrain from all activities that could be qualified as criminal. He promised to stop making public political statements. This concession, which became his greatest trauma, is published in the press and exploited for propaganda.

Overcoming the Crisis and Renewed Activity

After being released from custody, Havel is tormented by remorse and drinks. He feels he has disgraced himself and everything he stood for. Olga, his "rock", is skeptical and pragmatic but remains supportive. She accuses him of only harming himself and that the policeman exploited him. Havel finally comes to terms with his failure. He publishes the essay "THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS" (Moc bezmocných), dedicating it to the memory of Jan Patočka, one of the three spokesmen for Charter 77, who died in March 1977 after a long interrogation.

In April 1978, he co-founds the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted (VONS).

Second Imprisonment and the Letter to Olga (1982)

Havel continues his dissent. In October 1978, he attempts to attend the Railway Workers' Ball with friends, but they are thrown out. Havel is later arrested, and in July 1982, he is sentenced to four and a half years of imprisonment for the criminal offense of subversion of the republic.

The story concludes with a letter from prison at Plzeň-Bory, in which Havel writes to Olga about the difficulty of “accepting responsibility even for one’s own failures”, and finds the path to “true peace of soul”—which is the final victory in his struggle with the devil of his own weakness.