

Jan gives him a look and sits down to read it to himself.

Exterior—a balloon floats across. There is a leaflet dangling from it.

Milan, suffering in the heat, is waiting for Max.

The exterior scene has its own music, which is cheerful but not loud, like a hurdy-gurdy being played in the street.

A second balloon floats in. Milan grabs hold of the second balloon without difficulty. He detaches the leaflet and glances at it. He casually crumples it.

Max shows up, in summer clothes.

MILAN Ahoj, Max.

MAX Ahoj, ahoj. It always gets me . . . As if everyone here's in the navy.

MILAN The Czech navy? *(pause)* You're not at the . . . thing?

MAX I get invited to speak, not to listen to brain science. And you. Big fish now.

MILAN No, no. Medium size. With a desk.

MAX What's the balloon?

MILAN Ha! Ask your friends.

MAX What friends?

MILAN Last night—the friends you skipped the dinner for. *(reproachful)* That was ungrateful, Max. The philosophy faculty was under pressure to withdraw your invitation to the conference.

MAX Pressure from you?

MILAN Tsk, tsk, Max. You don't know who your friends are. *He uncrumples the leaflet.*

MILAN *(cont.)* 'Release the prisoners of Charter 77.' *(in jest)* I hope you didn't spend your evening blowing up balloons.

He takes his Party pin from his lapel.

MILAN *(cont.)* Party pin. Balloon.

He pops the balloon.

MILAN *(cont.)* Symbolism!

He laughs and replaces the pin.

MAX When I left the Party, I didn't go public, you know.

MILAN Max, Max . . .

MAX There were people in '56 who burned their Party cards in Trafalgar Square. I only told my family. It turned out my son-in-law was sleeping with a woman on his paper, so . . . Whooh! I'm glad Eleanor was dead. You can't imagine what it's like to be this week's carcass for the British press. Esme and her husband are trying to patch things up for the sake of the child, but I entertain some hope that nothing will come of that.

MILAN I am so sorry about your wife.

MAX Thank you.

MILAN So . . . what did you want?

MAX You remember Jan. Anyone who gives him a job gets a visit next day and he loses the job. I'm told he's sleeping on friends' floors, living as a beggar. I thought I'd try to do him a good turn.

MILAN Max, this is beneath you. Ask me for something worthwhile. Your friend is so unimportant, I'd be ashamed to notice his existence.

MAX I have nothing to offer.

MILAN Well . . . let me know when you have.

MAX Do you know you turned Jan into a Chartist?

MILAN No, but hum it to me and I'll pick it up . . .
(contemptuously) Chartist! Normal people don't like Chartists, they like a quiet life, nice flat, a car, a bigger TV . . . All this 'human rights' is foreigners thinking they're better than us. Well, they're not better than us.

MAX *(more in anger than in sorrow)* But it was you who called the Charter up from the deep! Is this what I was keeping the faith for? For some stupid policemen to make a pig's arse out of a pig's ear? Czechoslovakia was forgotten. You had it all to yourselves. And simply out of annoyance, for the sake of venting your spite on a few drop-outs who were of no danger to you—*no danger at all*—you made a festival for the Western press to shit all over the idea that a better way is still possible and looks—despite everything—looks east to the source.

MILAN Max. You know something? You fascinate me.

Max and Milan split and leave.

Jan finishes reading.

FERDINAND We've got over two hundred signatures.

JAN So. What are you going to do with it?

FERDINAND Post it to Husák.

JAN Post it.

FERDINAND With copies to the foreign press.

JAN Though it's not a dissident thing. You're an imbecile.

FERDINAND Okay.

JAN Everything's dissident except shutting up and eating shit. I wish to Christ I'd learned to play the guitar, but it's too late now. Have you got a pen?

Ferdinand gives him a pen. Jan signs, gives the Charter and the pen back to Ferdinand. He tries the turntable. He puts the Beach Boys on it, choosing the track. Ferdinand watches him uncomfortably.

FERDINAND I'll do tapes for you. I know it's not the same. I'm really sorry, Jan.

JAN Hey, Ferdo, it's only rock 'n' roll.

The Beach Boys start singing 'Wouldn't It Be Nice'. Jan starts picking up broken records, dumping them in a bin.

Fade to black.

End of Act One.