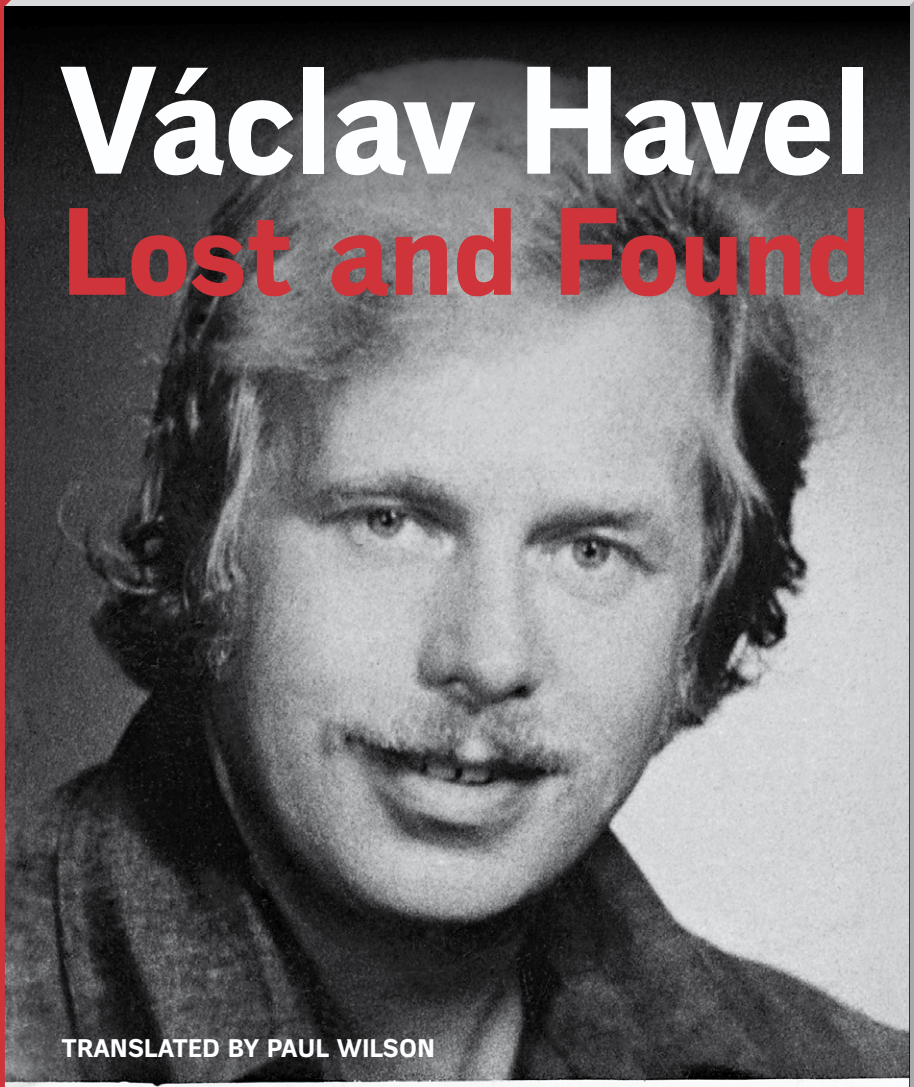
Václav Havel

Lost and Found



TRANSLATED BY PAUL WILSON

Hidden Notes On My First Incarceration

KAROLINUM PRESS VÁCLAV HAVEL LIBRARY VÁCLAV HAVEL SERIES

Lost and Found
Hidden Notes on My First Incarceration

Václav Havel

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CONTENTS

Introduction **9**

Ambushed **21**
Prison **63**
The Investigation **79**
My "Story" **117**

Afterword **191**

Notes **197**

Glossary of names **200**

Acknowledgements **207**

For Zdeněk Urbánek

INTRODUCTION

I.

> *When I was released from prison I wrote a report about a hundred pages long on the first days of Charter 77, my arrest and subsequent imprisonment. I hid it somewhere and to this day I have no idea where it is. Perhaps some day I'll find it.*
> — Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*

In 2014, David Dušek, a grandson of Czech writer and translator Zdeněk Urbánek, uncovered a trove of manuscripts, notebooks, diaries, and other papers stashed away in some boxes in his grandfather's garage in Prague. From the distinctive handwriting and the subject matter, he could see that the material had originated from the pen of his grandfather's closest friend, Václav Havel.

Among the papers in the boxes was a draft of Havel's long-lost account of the dramatic launch of the Czechoslovak human rights manifesto, Charter 77, his arrest and four-month detention, with almost daily interrogations by the secret police, and his traumatic release in May 1977. That summer and fall, he had written a draft of his report but then, worried that the police might discover the manuscript during a house search, he arranged for it to be hidden and then, perhaps strategically, forgot where it was.

In 2021, under the title *Někam jsem to ukryl (I Hid it Somewhere)*, the Václav Havel Library published the full text, edited and annotated by then director of the library, and Havel's biographer, Michael Žantovský. The volume included a brief memoir by Dušek; mini-biographies of Havel's police interrogators by historian Petr Blažek; a study of how Havel drew on his prison experience in his subsequent writing by his former literary secretary, Anna Freimanová, and an analytical essay on Havel's prison "journey" by Žantovský. The book also came with handwritten statements by Havel, and documents,

photographs and reports about the Havel case recovered from the State Security Police archives.

My translation of Havel's text is based on the Havel Library edition. Since Havel did not provide his book with a title, we took the liberty of giving the translation a slightly different one, *Lost and Found*, because it more accurately reflects the full story Havel tells. For it was not just the manuscript that was lost and then found. In a real sense, it was also Havel himself.

Lost and Found is a work like no other Havel ever wrote. In its raw urgency, its directness, its sly humour, in the range of its intellectual and emotional scope, it reveals the man in full. In it, we meet Havel the self-deprecating warrior for human rights; Havel the curious and sympathetic observer of everything and everyone around him, including himself; Havel the playwright, ever in search of new subjects to illuminate the world in which he finds himself; Havel, the merciless self-analyst, holding himself to the highest standards even as he agonizes over his failure to live up to them. The reader might even catch a glimpse, between the lines, of Havel, the future president.

II

In the empire of lies, the humblest truth is revolutionary; mere reality is subversive.
— Simon Leys, author of *Chinese Shadows*

The event triggering the wave of repression that had swept Havel into prison— and the starting point of his account in this book—was the release of the Charter 77 manifesto. On its surface, the manifesto was the epitome of decorum. Its tone was civil and measured, with no incendiary rhetoric or resounding appeals for revolutionary change. It referred to the international covenants on human rights that the Czechoslovak government had recently ratified and passed

into law after it signed the Helsinki Accords in 1976, and it observed that "in our country such rights exist, regrettably, on paper alone." It then laid out in stark detail how every one of those fundamental rights was routinely, systematically, and universally denied to its citizens by the regime. Charter 77, the manifesto said, did not aim to bring about "political or social reform or change," but merely to open a dialogue with the authorities, to draw attention to specific violations, and to suggest remedies that would "enable all citizens of Czechoslovakia to work and live as free human beings."

Beneath its measured language, however, Charter 77 was, as one of the Chartists called it, "a punch in the face" and the regime responded with the outrage of a wounded beast. It unleashed waves of interrogations, house searches, and arrests; it produced a flood of defamatory attacks on the signatories in the media, organized angry protests by "enraged" workers, and launched a nation-wide campaign to force people—both celebrities and ordinary citizens—to condemn, with their signatures, a document they had probably not read. The State Security police even implemented a program they cynically dubbed "Operation Slum Clearance," an "off-the-books" campaign of harassment and physical violence with the aim of forcing signatories to emigrate. (In 2002, two ex-members of the police involved in "Operation Slum Clearance" were given prison sentences of three years for having brutally abused Charter signatories.)

The secret police had long since identified Havel as a major protagonist in the country's unofficial opposition. Not that it took much sleuthing to figure that out: he had never made a secret of his beliefs, and it had been clear for at least two decades, going back to the 1950s, that whenever he spoke his mind, people paid attention. He was, therefore, a man to watch. His engagement in the liberalization of Czechoslovak culture that led to the short-lived reforms of the Prague Spring; his plays and essays satirizing and exposing the inner workings of the totalitarian system; his resistance activities during the Soviet invasion and his continuing activism afterwards, even as

a blacklisted writer—all of this made him a major person of interest to the secret police. By the time Charter 77 was released, the regime knew that by arresting Havel it would be taking a leading dissident out of circulation, perhaps seriously dispiriting the Chartists and disrupting their activities. Such, at least, was their intent.

Along with the virulent public campaign against the Charter, however, there seems to have been a certain strategic circumspection in the way the authorities dealt with high-profile Chartists like Havel. Charter 77 was now international news and the authorities found themselves in a kind of spotlight, and therefore in a serious dilemma. They had to respond to the challenge the Charter represented to their authority, yet everything they did to suppress it merely confirmed the manifesto's truth. Thus, they needed to be seen to observe the letter of the law even as they were violating its spirit.

That may explain why no signatory of Charter 77 was ever brought to trial on charges specifically related to the Charter: other pretexts had to be dredged up. Havel speculates that one of the reasons the investigation into his case dragged on for months was that they were trying to build a case against him that had nothing directly to do with Charter 77. When his case eventually went to trial in October 1977, it was on unrelated charges, for which he received a suspended sentence.

III

> *The experience of being in prison is impossible to describe and convey to others in a simple and understandable way. You simply have to live through it yourself.*
> — Václav Havel, *Lost and Found*

Havel entered prison thinking, somewhat cavalierly, that he understood what he was getting into and knew how to behave during interrogation so as not to betray his cause or his friends. After all, he

had already undergone over a hundred such "conversations" dating back at least as far as the 1960s, when he was a resident playwright and dramaturge in a small, upstart Prague theatre. He had also talked to fellow dissidents who had been to prison, and he would have read some of the many *samizdat* pamphlets circulating at the time, with advice on one's legal rights and how best to comport oneself during interrogation.

Havel's book begins on a high note. After being arrested in a Keystone Cops car chase through Prague and enduring a week of tedious interrogations while still "at liberty," he is finally taken into custody, and as the door to his cell clangs shut, his response is unexpectedly euphoric:

> The thought that, for the first time in my life, I was a prisoner, and a political prisoner at that, excited me, amused me, even cheered me up. . . I'm someone who is always curious and so of course I was curious as well to see what a prison was actually like, how things worked in it, how it was organized, and what impact it would have on me.

For a while, his curiosity and mild euphoria sustain him, and he regales us with vivid thumbnail sketches of his interrogators as well as a fuller portrait of his cellmate, Láďa, a trained locksmith who has walked away from a job he considered beneath him and is facing charges of either "parasitism" or "absenteeism," both "crimes" being the less visible flip sides of the regime's vaunted "right to work." Láďa, who thinks the authorities are all swine, also thinks the Chartists are naïve to have signed the manifesto. "With your full names?" he asks, incredulously. In the end, having read some of the attacks on the Charter in in the Communist Party daily, *Rudé právo*, he becomes a fan. "The whole world is talking about you, brother," he tells Havel. "You've really messed up their heads!"

Inevitably, the novelty of prison wears off and the weariness of routine takes over. Long stretches of boredom give him the chance

to think about his case, and if he finds himself looking forward to his anticipated trial as a liberation of sorts, it is not because he expects to walk free, but because it will mean an end to the uncertainty. Of course the uncertainty he feels has been deliberately induced. He has been softened up, not by torture, but by something more subtle and perhaps more effective: he has been stripped of his agency. He has been removed from his natural habitat, where he was surrounded by friends and loved ones. Now he lives entirely within the orbit and under the control of his interrogators. For weeks on end, he eats their food, wears their clothes, keeps their hours, complies with their regulations. He has little or no news from outside. His only real human contact is with his inquisitors, who treat him with a kind of civility that is all the harder to bear because he knows it is fake. Cold War fantasies like the torture chamber of Room 101 in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*, or the very real horrors perpetrated in Gestapo prison cells during World War II, are things of the past. What Havel experiences in Prague's Ruzyně prison could be more accurately described as The Banality of Evil 2.0. But, as he was about to discover, the banality did not make the evil any the less diabolical.

IV

> *[I]nterrogation has many qualities in common with a game: it is an engagement between two opponents, aimed at achieving a certain outcome; it has its own rules, in which each side seeks to achieve its own ends; each side has its own tactics and strategies, and never reveals to the other all the cards it holds. And whether the suspect realizes it or not, whether he desires it or not, the very fact that he has started talking to the investigator means that he has begun to play the game.*
> — Václav Havel, *Lost and Found*

In a police state, the state security police exist not to protect citizens but to protect the government. They have unlimited powers to in-

vestigate, root out, and prosecute deviant material, deviant thought, deviant attitudes, deviant behavior. The purpose of this force is to generate fear, and thus ensure the obedience of the population. No tyranny can survive without it.

In his famous 1975 open letter to Gustáv Husák, who was then the First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Havel memorably described the secret police as a "hideous spider whose invisible web runs right through the whole of society . . . [E]ven if most people, most of the time, cannot see this web . . . nor touch its filaments, even the simplest citizen is well aware of its existence, assumes its silent presence at every moment, in every place, and behaves accordingly."

Although Havel was no stranger to interrogations by agents of this "hideous spider," his arrest and detention in January 1977 was the first time he had come into prolonged contact with them, and despite his feelings of discomfort and often disgust in their presence, he was able to step back and assess their behaviour, observe their stratagems, guess at their intentions, and even more remarkably, track, record, and analyze his own responses. Havel never let any experience go to waste, and the experience of intensive grilling by the police not only gave him new insight into how the regime manipulated and subdued an entire population, it also gave him new insight into himself.

The third chapter of the book, "The Investigation," is a masterclass in the phenomenon of modern secret police interrogation techniques, and a study in how best to comport oneself when one becomes the object of their suspicion. According to Havel, there are two categories of interrogation: those conducted while the suspect is still "at liberty," and those conducted with suspects held in in custody. When "at liberty" suspects may still feel that they have some agency, either to refuse to talk, or to argue with the police, to defend and justify themselves and their actions. But interrogation while in police custody is something else again. "In detention," he writes,

"everything is different. There everyone talks. Because once in detention, as Major Cibulka said, 'the fun is over'. . ."

There is no real mystery in this, Havel says. Because prisoners in investigative custody spend most of their time alone, isolated in their cell, they can actually look forward to interrogations, not just as an opportunity for human contact, or in the hope of finding out more about their case, but on a more existential level, to be able to step out of the anonymity of prison life and reconfirm their identity. "During interrogation," Havel writes, "you are no longer just a number, but a specific person—Václav Havel. Your existence transcends that biological anonymity and once more takes on an individual human form. It is, of course, a miserable, upside-down substitute for an "existential home," but it is a substitute nonetheless, because in the interrogation room you are taken for yourself, and they give you the chance to appear and assert yourself as a person."

For the first three months of his incarceration, Havel felt he had absolved himself well, that he had betrayed neither the cause nor any of his fellow Chartists. What he was unprepared for, though, was something he did not realize until it was too late: that his interrogators were not ultimately interested in wringing a confession from him. Their real aim was to get him to betray himself. To Havel's deep dismay, they almost succeeded.

V

The four months I spent in investigative custody was not my worst experience in 1977. My worst experience was something else, something that had its origins in the time I spent in custody, but did not come to pass until I was out of prison.
— Václav Havel, *Lost and Found*

The book's final chapter, "My Story," delves into what Havel later described as the darkest period in his life. It was triggered by what he thought was a routine letter addressed to the Prosecutor General requesting to be released from prison. In it, he made what he felt were cunningly worded promises to refrain, once he was freed, from activity that might be considered criminal. He also offered to step down as one of the Charter spokesmen. As he wrote to his wife Olga from prison years later, he had persuaded himself that everything he had written was true, but he had somehow overlooked his own profound insight into the nature of truth, that "truth lies not only in what is said, but also in who says it, and to whom, why, and how, and under what circumstances." Thanks to that "minor oversight," he had come very close to giving the police, of his own volition, exactly what they needed from him.

The dawning realization so upset him that he began to believe he had fallen into the clutches of the devil. About the same time, he was given, along with two other books from the prison library, a Czech translation of Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus*, a retelling of the legend of the man who sold his soul to the devil in exchange for worldly power and pleasures. This bizarre coincidence seemed to illuminate his situation and, ever the playwright, he began to plot out a new play based on the Faust legend, but drawing on his own experience. (He finally brought his original inspiration to fruition in 1986 when he wrote what many consider his most personal play, *Temptation*.)

Havel was released from prison on May 20, 1977. The same day, the Czechoslovak Press Bureau issued a press release from the Ministry of the Interior stating that, after due consideration, he had concluded that some of his past actions had been inappropriate, and that he was resigning as a spokesman for the Charter and devoting himself to his writing. The aim was to discredit him in the eyes of the other Charter signatories and the public, and thus take him out of the game. "It was a very dirty trick," Havel writes, "but it has to be said, it didn't work."

He was devastated, but his friends rallied round and celebrated his return. He was also buoyed by the realization that the world he had returned to had changed, for the better, thanks to the Charter. "This was no longer a society in a state of torpor," he wrote, "but a society whose latent crisis was laid bare in the clash between the powers that be and those who no longer wished to be silenced."

Still, it took years for him to get over the shame he felt for his failure. The experience had shaken him to the core, and as he wrote to Olga five years later, "The shock cast doubt on my very identity. Everything I was, for myself and for others, suddenly found itself open to question. Was I still the same person my entire previous history had defined me as, or was I now someone else, someone who, in extreme circumstances, knuckles under?"

Havel's understanding of how the totalitarian system had tried to destroy him led him to a deeper understanding of how it holds its sway over everyone: by undermining people's sense of who they are and robbing them of their dignity and their ability to act responsibly according to their consciences. He came to see, not just that the regime was based on lies, but that the very institutions that constituted the regime and the people who worked for them, were mendacious at their core. By daring to reject that mendacity, by "living in truth" as Havel and the Chartists had tried to do, people could begin to reclaim their lives and thus undermine the power that enslaved them.

That argument became a central theme of his most important and influential essay, "The Power of the Powerless."

Lost and Found is the record of a turning point, not just in the life of one man, but—because even in prison that man never ceased to be a public writer—a turning point in the life of his country as well.

Paul Wilson, July 2026

If the Czechoslovak secret police had really understood the events they so carefully monitor, they would have realized, long before Charter *77* appeared, that something like it was in the works, and they might have avoided the shock the launch of the Charter gave them.

For Charter *77* didn't just drop out of a clear blue sky. Its appearance was a natural outcome of the circumstances that gave rise to it. It came into being because the time was ripe for it. Its birth was preceded by no profound analyses, no complex calculations, no lengthy preparations. Rather it arose from a general feeling that something like it had to be done.

I will attempt, in another place, to reflect on what specifically gave rise to that feeling, that is, on the intellectual background from which the Charter emerged. The essential point here is that none of those who helped bring the Charter into the world—and I am fortunate to have been one of them—could have foreseen that it would attain the reach and importance that it has today. (Many penetrating essays have already been written on the subject, first and foremost among them being the basic explication of the Charter by Jan Patočka, "What the Charter Is and Is Not.") In any case it could not have been foreseen because the Charter only attained that reach and importance after some time had elapsed. The credit due to those who were there at the beginning is not so much because they developed and created the Charter as it is today, and what it means, but rather because their intuition was sound: they sensed what the situation was ready for, and they laid the groundwork for what the Charter then became. At the same time, what it did become for them was precisely what it became for others: a school that gave them a deeper insight into the world, and a space to develop a more profound awareness of their place in it.

That's why the specific details of how the Charter came into being aren't particularly important. If those who created it had not

launched it in December 1976, it's likely that others would soon have been found to bring to life something quite similar, from the same basic intuition.

But there's another reason why I don't wish to write in any detail about these matters: at the time, we decided that on principle, we would not tell the police anything about the specific circumstances surrounding the origin of the Charter. And even though since then the police have clearly learned a lot about it, it would still be pointless to reveal here any more than they already know. By now, it probably couldn't do much harm to anyone, but the principle is sound and I intend to adhere to it.

Therefore, briefly: on December 11, 1976, several people from different intellectual circles came together in the commonly held belief that something ought to be done. Out of their discussions came the intention to write a declaration that would include a concise analysis of the state of human rights in our country, and would conclude by announcing the creation of a permanent body that would concern itself with this matter. This first meeting was soon followed by two larger sessions in which the text of the declaration was written and edited and a method of gathering signatures agreed upon.

Our experience so far had taught us that gathering a large number of signatures supporting a declaration like this would have to be done with all possible dispatch because the police would find out about it in a matter of days and move to block it. Nevertheless we decided not to rush matters and gather signatures quietly over Christmas, during various holiday gatherings. Our hope was that the attention of the police would not be as intense over Christmas, and as well, the technique of gathering signatures was worked out so that it wouldn't involve any unusual activity: the people who met for this purpose were those who were in regular touch anyway, so that no untoward suspicions would be aroused. The plan worked, and by Wednesday, December 29 at 4:00 p.m.— the deadline set for completion—all the signature slips (there were substantially more than we

expected: 241) were assembled in once place. We immediately made several copies of an alphabetical list of the signatories and attached them to copies of the declaration. I was on edge all that day, quite pointlessly as it turned out, since as far as we could tell, there was never the slightest indication that the police suspected anything We conferred with friends on the next steps, drank some bubbly and, satisfied with a job well done, went our separate ways.

The time between that deadline and January 6th, when we planned to deliver the Charter declaration to various state institutions, was one of relative calm. It's true that the period was fraught with danger because, although we were no longer collecting signatures, the danger that the police would learn of our plan and go on the offensive grew by the hour. Even so, we decided to risk it because as well as delivering the declaration to the state organizations, we also intended to mail a copy of the Charter declaration to each of the signatories, which meant we needed time to type them out.

In that period, about twenty of us held one last meeting in my flat, where we agreed upon the immediate tasks to be undertaken once the initial declaration had been handed over. The timing was important because after the handover, we knew it would be extremely difficult to meet in such large numbers undisturbed by the police. (Luckily, the police never got wind of this meeting. They learned of it only three months later during an interrogation with one of the participants.)

At the beginning of January, despite our efforts to draw as little attention to ourselves as possible, the police began to suspect that something was afoot. They conducted about three exploratory and cautionary interrogations, but they clearly had no knowledge of the text of the declaration or how large the list of signatories was, and they obviously didn't consider the matter very important.

It appears that they got their first precise information about the text of the declaration and the initial list of signatories sometime on

January 5. The information apparently came from France, from the printing house of *Le Monde*, which was set to publish the Charter declaration on the evening of January 6. Now, of course, the police began to realize the significance and the extent of the whole matter and there is every indication that sometime in the night between January 5 and 6, they mobilized a small team of officers, the first consequence of which was our notorious ambushing at noon the following day. We were in a race against the clock, and we lost it by just a couple of hours.

On the morning of Thursday, January 6, Ludvík Vaculík and Pavel Landovský, whom I'd asked to act as chauffeur since my own car was out of commission, came to pick me up. We drove to our friend Zdeněk Urbánek's house, while Pavel continued on to an apartment to pick up the suitcase containing copies of the declaration in envelopes addressed to all the signatories. At Zdeněk's, we got everything ready to hand over to the state authorities, and to mail out to the signatories. (Because of a misunderstanding, the master list of original signatures was still in the suitcase; we had intended to return it to its hiding place but we were ambushed before we were able to do so).

When we set out earlier that morning, I had noticed a car with two men in it parked about a hundred meters from our home, but I hadn't yet drawn any hasty conclusions. At Zdeněk's, however, we knew with absolute certainty that we were under surveillance: a Volga police cruiser was parked a short distance from his building, and another vehicle was prowling back and forth in a small park just across from his flat. We now knew they would follow our every move, but we still intended to stick to our original plan. We did not, however, foresee that they would ambush us beforehand and so we took no precautionary measures to ensure that the original signature slips were safely stashed away and that the declarations were mailed to the signatories separately.

As we set off around noon, the Volga fell in behind us. We soon realized that we were being tracked by several cars and that we'd have a hard time shaking them. Even so, Pavel – out of some kind of chauffeur's pride — tried to lose them by driving wildly back and forth around Hanspaulka. The only advantage we gained by these manoeuvres was that we found ourselves momentarily alone in a side street where I was able to cram at least some of the envelopes into a post-box. On the intersection just past the former French high-school we found ourselves boxed in by several cruisers. Policemen piled out of them and stopped traffic from entering the intersection, then yelled at us to get out of our car. They put us in separate vehicles, confiscated our bags with all our things, and drove us off to their headquarters in Bartolomějská Street.

The ambush must have looked like a scene from a gangster film. Passers-by stopped to stare, perhaps thinking they were witnessing a movie shoot, because in the midst of all the uproar they could see the familiar face of Pavel Landovský. As they were taking us away to Bartolomějská Street, I thought: This is a fine way to launch our struggle for human rights . . .

Obviously we were in no position to deliver the Charter declaration directly to the government, the Federal Assembly, and the Czechoslovak Press Office, as we had intended. We were also deeply upset at our own ineptitude, thanks to which the police had got their hands on a richer haul than they had expected: they were now in possession not only of two hundred copies of the declaration, but also of the names and addresses of all the signatories. Thanks to this haul, the police were easily able to identify all the initial signatories, which was not that easy in the case of those who signed it later. If the signatory was not generally well-known, or if he or she were not already known to the police, then all they had to go by was their names and professions, information the Charter made public, but that was not enough to readily identify those involved, which is why

to this day, the police have still not located many signatories. (There is some consolation in the fact that the first signatories were almost always people the police could quickly identify even without their addresses.)

Of course it was unfortunate that, thanks to our carelessness, the police also had material proof that we'd made many copies of the Charter and were prepared to distribute them, useful evidence should the case come to trial. On the other hand, it must be said that the police intervention—an act that had prevented citizens from exercising their right to petition their government—was clear proof, at the very moment the Charter's existence became public, that its claims of human rights abuses were justified. Moreover, it merely increased international interest in the Charter, since reports of its publication abroad included accounts of the ambush, which gave the whole affair an appropriately dramatic flair.

In Bartolomějská Street, they tried to interrogate me, but I merely repeated that as a spokesman for Charter 77 I was only willing to discuss it with the government agencies it was addressed to, and I requested several times to be allowed at once to deliver our declaration to them. For about an hour, their cameraman tried, unsuccessfully, to film me. I covered my face with my hands or stood facing the wall and didn't fall for the various tricks they used to get me to look at them. At one point they took me into a large room where the contents of our bags, including all the confiscated envelopes, were laid out on long tables. Despite my protests, they photographed me standing behind one of the tables, like a gangster, while a couple of cops shouted crude insults at me. (It was only later that I realized the beauty of being yelled at: it fortifies one's capacity for implacable resistance. If the police behave pleasantly, it increases the risk of becoming caught in their net.)

They let me go home at about two o'clock in the morning, that is, about fourteen hours later. I was quite surprised at this, because for the longest time, I was convinced they were going to keep me

there indefinitely. In the meantime, they had searched my home, where they found a wastebasket with some crumpled pieces of paper with notes about future plans for the Charter. (The police were like excited children with their find. and it seems that they expected to get a lot from that discovery, but in time it was somehow forgotten.)

I spent the next day—Friday, January 7—with the police again: they picked me up in the morning and I had to go with them to be present as they searched my country home in Hrádeček. When we arrived, two police cars with officers from the Hrádeček and Trutnov detachments of the State Security police were waiting for us. They brought with them, as a witness, the secretary of the Vlčice National Committee, who was clearly attending an event of this kind for the first time and was pretty distraught by it. I gave him an apple from our cellar. In the end, there were at least fifteen policemen in the house.

Shortly after we arrived, Visconti—the nickname Landovský and I gave their cameraman—appeared in the courtyard, up to his knees in snow, and again attempted to film everything. I informed him that he was filming in our house without our permission and thus committing a felony, but he just made a face at me. He filmed all the rooms, and in particular he shot a kind of improvised display of my books that they arranged on a large couch in our main room. Visconti also wanted to film me, but I put our cat on my shoulder, knowing that a shot like that would be useless for their purposes.

On our way back to Prague, we got a flat tire. The driver didn't have a jack, so we didn't get back to Bartolomějská Street until later that night. While two of them waited with me in the car, one of them went upstairs to ask what was to be done with me. When he came back, I learned, to my delight, that I was once again a free citizen. I immediately went to the Kohouts', where several friends were waiting; they welcomed me with open arms, and told me that on January 6 and 7, the Charter declaration had been published in several international dailies, and that all the international radio sta-

tions were commenting on it and had broadcast news of the ambush as well.

On Saturday and Sunday we had a reprieve from the police (though their surveillance of us continued) and I spent that snowy weekend with many friends in productive activity around the Charter. We held various meetings, we learned who had been interrogated, who had had their homes searched and so on. We analyzed the situation and tried to decide what our next steps would be. On Saturday afternoon, I visited Professor Patočka and we wrote Charter declaration No. 2, which was an account of the events of the last few days, which we telephoned to Reuters in Vienna on Sunday morning. That night I had a decent sleep in anticipation of a hard week ahead.

If the initial interrogations by the police were what you might describe as scattershot, done purely to get their bearings (they hadn't yet decided how to handle the whole matter), then on Monday, January 10, the interrogations became more focused. In Ruzyně prison and Bartolomějská Street, the familiar "interrogations over coffee" began. At this time almost all of the initial signatories were interrogated. A select group—including Professor Patočka, Dr. Hájek and myself, as the three Charter spokesmen who were suspected of knowing how the Charter had come about and how the gathering of signatures had been organized—were interrogated in Ruzyně every day from morning until late afternoon or into the evening.

At that time, my interrogator was a certain Major Hudec, a tall, relatively polite man with an odd, rasping laugh, not deliberately sarcastic, but rather unpleasant all the same. I refused—as did all the others—to say anything about the Charter, and because Major Hudec seemed incapable of having an interesting discussion, we spent a rather gloomy time together, long periods of silence alternating with short periods of the same, oft-repeated dialogue that went roughly like this: "If I do something wrong, and I'm a man,

I'm going to come clean! We'll take an hour to write it up and you can go home! I don't get you – are you a man?", "But I haven't done anything wrong!", "If you haven't done anything wrong, then for God's sake just say so. If I do something wrong, and I'm a man, I'm going to come clean! We'll take an hour to write it up and you can go home! I don't get you – are you a man?" And it went on like that several times (in my plays, I call repetitions like that "circular dialogue") followed by more long periods of silence. And then again: "If I do something . . ." Major Hudec went at me like that for two days, each time for ten or eleven hours at a time, despite the fact that it got him nowhere. At first I wondered, how someone with such a lack of imagination could have become a major. But later it occurred to me that I may have been underestimating him: the sense of futility that radiated from him began to make me feel physically ill. My head ached and I felt dizzy and I was constantly battling a strange lethargy that made me feel as though I were about to faint. Was that precisely what Hudec was after? He clearly had two possibilities in mind: either I would lose my nerve and spill the beans; or I would keep my head about me, but then when I went home in the evening, I'd be so beaten down I'd have no energy left for the tasks that awaited me: answering questions from the reporters who phoned from Vienna, Bonn, or Paris for comments, or consulting with other Chartists, gathering information, and so on. In short, I wouldn't be able to function as a spokesman for Charter 77. So Hudec's approach clearly wasn't as pointless as it seemed, though it was not successful: my nerves held out and I was able to carry out my evening duties as a spokesman.

On Tuesday evening Hudec invited me—as usual—to come back the next morning. So on Wednesday morning I showed up at the gatehouse of Ruzyně prison and said that Major Hudec had summoned me, and the guard asked me to wait. I sat in the waiting room for half an hour, trying to comfort a woman who was siting there in tears. At last the guard came back and told me there was

no one by that name there. I asked if that meant I was free to go home, and he merely shrugged. So home I went. It was about nine o'clock, and at first, I rejoiced in my unexpected freedom. But I was in a quandary: what was I supposed to do now? I had become so used to these daily interrogations that I suddenly found myself faced with a desolate and hopeless void. Should I sit at home and wait for them to realize their mistake and come and pick me up? Or should I grasp the chance and go into hiding? But where could I go? The Chartists were either at work or being interrogated in Ruzyně—and spending my time on anything other than the Charter seemed absurd. Eventually, I decided on a rather strange solution, somewhere between disappearing and flaunting my presence in broad daylight: I would go and sit in the Slavia Café. (To explain: the Slavia has long been an important part of my life. I was a regular there for most of my youth; it was there that I experienced my literary beginnings, and engaged in endless intense discussions with friends and fellow students; as an apprentice I'd slack off from work there, and as a student, it was where I'd skip lectures; twenty-five years ago, it was where I met Jiří Kolář, Zdeněk Urbánek, Jan Grossman and others; I even met my future wife there. But it had been a good fifteen years since I stopped frequenting the Slavia, and I couldn't remember when I'd last been there.) I sat by a window, ordered a coffee and mulled things over. And slowly but surely I began to suspect that it wasn't a mistake after all, but that the entire anomalous situation, when everyone but me was in Ruzyně, signaled something far more ominous: what if at that moment, they were deciding to alter my status from witness to suspect?

It seemed unlikely they would lock up a large group of Chartists and hold a monster trial. But they might lock up an individual to frighten the others and to show us they were not to be toyed with, and at the same time to test what the consequences would be if they locked up a "dissident"—that seemed entirely plausible. But if that was the route they'd chosen to take, then it was almost certain that

I'd be the one dealt that card. They were not yet that familiar with Professor Patočka and they were certainly treating him as more of a figurehead (what a fatal error that was!) and in the given circumstances, they wouldn't dare touch Dr. Hájek. Whereas I was the youngest of the spokesmen, and they would certainly consider me the most radical and, for various reasons, and for some time, I'd been more of a thorn in their side than many others (fresh in their memory was the trial of the musical underground, including my public condemnation of the minister of the interior for spreading false information). Moreover, they had every reason to assume that, given my resourcefulness and the fact that as the youngest, I would be contributing the most to the practical organization of the Charter (also I was the only spokesman with a car). At the same time, I was in fact the only one, or the main one, against whom they had clear proof of organizational involvement: after all, they had caught me with two hundred copies of the initial declaration; they'd tapped my phone when I telephoned Declaration No. 2 to Vienna; they'd found those notes in my wastebasket. And they'd certainly assumed that I'd arranged for the publication of the Charter abroad and synchronized that with the planned handover of the Charter to government organizations. Perhaps they were even harbouring the naïve illusion that the Charter couldn't function without me. (Later, I became aware of many other reasons that could have played a role in their singling me out.)

When I put these factors together with that morning's disappearance of Major Hudec, it became pretty clear that they intended to lock me up. The thought of incarceration was not in itself that terrible: I was not afraid of going to prison, and mainly I felt—if I may put it that way—that incarceration would not be pointless, because it would be for something worthwhile.

But it was distressing not to know this for sure, or when it might happen. It could be any minute now, or it could be in a week. Was I ready for this? Would I be prepared for that moment? You can pre-

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