

The story takes place in Prague in the former Czechoslovakia during August 1968. Tomáš Sinek is in a pub saying goodbye to his friends. Tomorrow he is due to leave for a strawberry-picking job in England by crossing the Iron Curtain. He is also saying goodbye to Natasha, his part-friend, part-girlfriend. He'd like to sleep with her tonight, but she refuses, saying perhaps when Tomáš gets back from England.

Tomáš's parents are packing his bags. They are sending him away from the country for good. His father was against the idea,

but has given in. His mother is also distraught, but only wants the best for her "little boy".

In the morning, Tomáš is woken by his father—Czechoslovakia has been occupied by the Soviet Red

to demonstrate. Tomáš isn't the slightest bit interested. He wants only to get to the English strawberries. As soon as the trains are running again, he'll be off. Tomorrow, the day after, whenever—he's already packed and ready.

Tomáš decides to pass the time while he's waiting with Natasha, who doesn't know that Tomáš is leaving for good, only that he's going away for three weeks. They both prefer an unfettered and less serious approach to life, but Prague is very serious, political and depressing. So in the end they set off on her bicycle for a trip outside Prague, anywhere where they can spend this senseless period having fun.

There is tension in the Sinek household. Mrs. Sinek wants to get Tomáš across the border to the West, but strategic-thinking Mr. Sinek thinks it will be difficult. However, he's mainly still waiting for instructions from

The Russian soldier in the log cabin is trying to find out if they are as close to the border with West Germany as he thinks. When he finds out that it's at least two hundred kilometers, he's disappointed and goes back to his patrol position at the bridge.

Tomáš continues in his efforts at lovemaking, until Natasha tells him that she is pregnant by a young man who she left because of it. Tomáš decides that this kind of waiting for a train is not to his taste after all; it's too serious by half. He tries to back off a little, and in the end takes the way out that Natasha suggests—he doesn't have to stay with her. But just as he is leaving, he bumps into the returning Russian in the doorway. The soldier doesn't believe that Germany is so far away, when Tomáš has a passport instead of his ID card and his bags all packed. Tomáš tells him why he has his passport with him and

to do the same again. On top of that, Tomáš has realized that he doesn't want to go anywhere without Natasha.

Mr. Sinek is captured by the secret police at the copying machine, and the resistance is over.

The Russian soldier once more catches Natasha and Tomáš by surprise. There are patrols out looking for him everywhere. He doesn't have a chance in uniform and he needs civilian clothing. Tomáš decides to be rid of him once and for all. His father was a former resistance worker, and would be pleased to be asked to help. During the war he was in some kind of cell making false identity papers. He could do it again and would certainly drive the Russian to the border in his Wartburg, just like in the old days. The Russian waits with Natasha in the log cabin while Tomáš goes to get his father.

He finds his father depressed by the knowledge that

Czech Republic

ENGLISH STRAWBERRIES

Anglické jahody

Army. His father thinks there's going to be war, and maybe it has already started. Outside, it is a normal August morning, peaceful and quiet everywhere, but as a member of the Communist Party, his father has inside information. He is a passionate believer in Czechoslovakia's "socialism with a human face" and in Alexander Dubček, the Party leader. Tomáš finds politics distasteful. He is not interested in the human or inhuman face of socialism, which he thinks are the imaginings of the older generation. He only wants to get to England, where nobody is fighting for a better tomorrow. His father tries to waken some sense of patriotism in him, but in vain. Tomáš is interested only in reaching Prague's Wilson Main Railway Station to catch his train. His father doesn't want to take him there, since he needs to stay by the phone to wait for instructions from Party officials. And today he is far less happy about Tomáš's emigrating than he was yesterday. He finally says he will take his son to the station, but they can't get there because of the Soviet tanks. Tomáš walks the rest of the way, but no trains are running. The station is deserted and nobody knows when the trains will start up again.

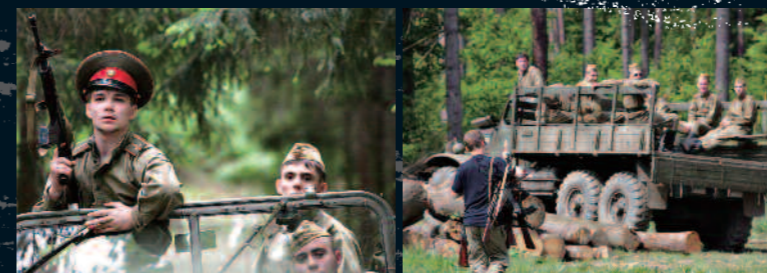
Tomáš doesn't want to go home, so he goes looking for his friends at their favorite haunt. Everyone is trying to decide what to do; some want to blow up the tanks, others

the Party. Will it be resistance, or barricades in the streets? That is still to be decided, but he's sure there will be fighting!

Natasha's parents have a cottage, a log cabin on the other side of Davle. The town has been turned into a film set as the German town of Remagen. There are German shop names on the buildings and German street names everywhere. At the bridge they encounter a Red Army patrol. Tomáš comes under immediate suspicion because he's carrying his passport, while Natasha has her ID card. However, unlike him she speaks Russian well, and explains everything away. They cross the bridge and climb up the hillside to the log cabin belonging to Natasha's parents.

They continue to joke and Tomáš keeps on testing her resistance to his charms, considering this a fun way to wait for a train. But suddenly they find one of the Red Army patrol soldiers in the log cabin.

Mr. Sinek finally receives his instructions from the Party. There are to be no barricades, no resistance, only to remain calm. Just keep calm, comrade! That really upsets him, and he decides that keeping calm is the last thing he's going to do. He still has unpleasant memories of the Munich Agreement of 1938 that resulted in the country's breakup.



Vladimír Drha,
Director
Vladimír Křepelka,
Director of Photography
Martin Šafránek,
Screenwriter



Natasha realizes that he isn't going to England for just three weeks, and was only killing time with her. One trick after another, but neither of them really wants to end the relationship.

Mr. Sinek and a friend take over the office of the local committee of the Communist Party and use the Party's copying machine to print leaflets urging resistance.

Mrs. Sinek is convinced that they'll lock up her husband for the third time. First it was the Germans, then under Stalin, and now a third time. At first she wanted to throw herself out of the window, but now, with a calming shot of rum inside her, she takes a more realistic view of things. Perhaps she can find herself a nice lodger instead.

The Russian soldier is being sought by members of his patrol down at the bridge and he has not reported back. From that moment on he is a deserter and must either run away or suffer the consequences. Tomáš wants to be rid of him, but Natasha wishes to save him. It seems that the Russian is a talented poet and a romantic soul, with an uncle in Biarritz who escaped in the early fifties. Everything about him is somehow very Russian and he would never make it to the border. So he goes back to Prague with Tomáš, who realizes that his own desire to emigrate is nowhere near as strong. After all, it was his father who set up the trip, and he could certainly manage

his life has resulted in defeat. He has signed as they had wanted, agreeing not to fight, and to simply remain calm and cooperate. He has always lost out at everything. He is still willing to take Tomáš to the border, but only Tomáš; he refuses to risk any more by taking the Russian soldier or Natasha.

In the meantime the Russian and Natasha have become much closer in the log cabin. Not in a sexual way, but through a long and close embrace—she feels genuinely sorry for him. Only later does she find out that the verses with which he so entranced her were actually penned by the Russian poet Sergei Esenin. Even so, she considers him to be a man with a remarkable imagination who deserves to seek out his dream. Tomáš returns empty-handed. He dresses the Russian in his own clothes, and to spite his father, also gives him his passport. Now Natasha realizes how he really feels about her.

The Russian sets out, but the Red Army patrol on the bridge in Davle finds him and shoots him dead. Natasha and Tomáš know nothing about this and never will. They are finally in their own world, the world of eternal lovers where the old people can't trouble them.

English Strawberries	
STOCK USED	ETERNA 500