

*Under The Poplar Trees* sample

(Lights up on roll-call area. JOSEF & YOUNG MEYER stand at attention.)

JOSEF

Thirty-six hundred.

YOUNG MEYER

What?

JOSEF

We could say three thousand six hundred. But I think...correct me if I'm wrong here, but I believe that three thousand six hundred...sounds longer than thirty-six hundred. What's your opinion?

YOUNG MEYER

My opinion? What in god's name does it matter what my opinion is on this?

JOSEF

Meyer, you know your opinion always matters very much to me.

YOUNG MEYER

We are standing out here in---

JOSEF

Where are we standing?

YOUNG MEYER

You know where.

JOSEF

Easy, Meyer. Easy.

YOUNG MEYER

Don't ask ridiculous questions. You know where we are. I know where we are.

JOSEF

Just for the record then. It's good to be precise. It's necessary to---

YOUNG MEYER

Why? Why in hell is it necessary to do anything but---

JOSEF

Because we can. Because it's under our control. Because it's important...to us.

YOUNG MEYER

To us? Josef, you're really trying my patience here.

JOSEF

More than before?

YOUNG MEYER

More than ever.

JOSEF

Well, that's something. Still, back to the matter at hand...

YOUNG MEYER

I don't see why it matters.

JOSEF

And furthermore...go ahead.

YOUNG MEYER

And furthermore if we must...if we must stand here...perfectly still...in the cold...

JOSEF

Yes, go on, go on.

YOUNG MEYER

In the dark. And you're going to tell me it's not yet completely dark, aren't you, Josef? Because that's the kind of nonsensical hair-splitting you enjoy, isn't it?

JOSEF

You are brilliant, Meyer, you really are.

YOUNG MEYER

All right then. Not yet dark.

JOSEF

You are right. Absolutely, positively right. But what do we call it? Can we perhaps give it a better name?

YOUNG MEYER

Evening?

JOSEF

Dusk?

YOUNG MEYER

Twilight?

JOSEF

Gloaming.

YOUNG MEYER

What's gloaming?

JOSEF

The time before night. It's Scottish, I believe.

YOUNG MEYER

We're not Scottish, Josef.

JOSEF

That's true. You prefer...

YOUNG MEYER

Not yet dark. That says it.

JOSEF

All right then.

YOUNG MEYER

As I was saying...we are standing here in the cold.

JOSEF

In the not yet dark.

YOUNG MEYER

Yes, yes. And how long has it been---

JOSEF

Easy, easy with that one.

YOUNG MEYER

Then, shall we talk about why?

JOSEF

Powerful word, why. But in this case...

YOUNG MEYER

Agreed. The "why" is...

JOSEF

Irrational. Wouldn't you say so?

YOUNG MEYER

Yes. Not to them, of course. They said we must stand here because two prisoners from barrack eight tried to escape.

JOSEF

Not that they made it.

YOUNG MEYER

No. They didn't.

JOSEF

Caught as they came out on the other side of the fence.

YOUNG MEYER

And then hung.

JOSEF

Yes.

YOUNG MEYER

The one was young.

JOSEF

Yes. He was.

YOUNG MEYER

But if they've been caught. And if they've been killed. Why then keep us standing here? What purpose does it serve?

JOSEF

Careful. We mustn't ask questions we don't want to know the answer to. We're agreed on that, correct?

YOUNG MEYER

Yes. But there's a part of me that still wants to know why.

JOSEF

Will you feel better if you know?

YOUNG MEYER

I will. I truly believe I will.

JOSEF

Very well, then.

YOUNG MEYER

Tell me, Josef. Tell me why.

JOSEF

All right, Meyer. Here it is. The answer is...clearly, they are absurdists.

YOUNG MEYER

Absurdists?

JOSEF

Yes.

YOUNG MEYER

What's an absurdist?

JOSEF

Someone who lives in an absurd universe. The problem is, of course...they don't know that they're absurdists.

YOUNG MEYER

That's not our only problem.

JOSEF

Careful. In a situation like this, it's best to speak in non self-referential language.

YOUNG MEYER

I am freezing. Do you understand? Freezing!

JOSEF

Steady, Meyer, steady.

YOUNG MEYER

How can I talk without reference to myself when I am freezing? It's not possible.

JOSEF

But that's what we are doing. That's what we have been doing. Right?

YOUNG MEYER

Your madness approaches new heights, Josef. Or is it possibly new depths?

JOSEF

And your analysis is, as always, precise.

YOUNG MEYER

So. How many hours have we been standing---

JOSEF

Meyer, we must be sure we're ready to hear the answer before we ask the question.

YOUNG MEYER

How...long?

JOSEF

Three. It's a guess of course. I'd prefer to think of it as an educated guess. But would you agree that probably, we have done three. We have done that much.

YOUNG MEYER

Josef, what if...what if they make it...four? I don't...I don't think I can---

JOSEF

Be still, Meyer. Just be still another...second. Can you do that?

YOUNG MEYER

A second?

JOSEF

Just one second.

YOUNG MEYER

That's all?

JOSEF

Yes. You can, see? We can both stand still here another second. Two seconds, maybe? Three seconds...

YOUNG MEYER

But a second is so short, so---

JOSEF

Exactly! That's precisely it. We do one second.

There it goes.

YOUNG MEYER

I think that was more like two seconds. Or three or even four. Your counting is faulty.

JOSEF

That's why I need your help to do it.

YOUNG MEYER

But...how high must we...

JOSEF

It's what I said before. Thirty-six hundred.

YOUNG MEYER

Thirty-six...hundred?

JOSEF

There are thirty-six hundred seconds in an hour.

YOUNG MEYER

Oh, I don't know if I can...

JOSEF

Think of it as one second at a time. Then we can do it.

YOUNG MEYER

Are you sure?

JOSEF

Absolutely.

YOUNG MEYER

When do we begin?

JOSEF

Now. I'll start. One.

YOUNG MEYER

But what if...?

JOSEF

Yes?

YOUNG MEYER

What if we begin at the end?

JOSEF

You mean...

YOUNG MEYER

Thirty-six hundred. Minus one.

JOSEF

That's brilliant, Meyer! Ever brilliant. Thirty-five hundred-ninety-nine. Superb!

YOUNG MEYER

Thirty-five hundred ninety-eight.

JOSEF

Thirty-five hundred ninety-seven.

(Lights slowly down...)