

**ROSENCRANTZ AND  
GUILDENSTERN  
ARE DEAD**

**BY TOM STOPPARD**

**A DPS ACTING EDITION PUBLISHED BY**

**BROADWAY**  
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**ALL TOM STOPPARD PLAYS**

The Play must be performed as published in the authorized edition. It is understood that there will be no nudity in the Play unless specifically indicated in the script and that nothing in the stage presentation or stage business in the Play will alter the spirit of the Play as written.

The first major production of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* was first performed by the Royal National Theatre on April 11, 1967. It was directed by Derek Goldby, the design was by Desmond Healey, the lighting was by Richard Pilbrow, and the music and sound effects were by Marc Wilkinson. The cast was as follows:

ROSENCRANTZ ..... John Stride  
GUILDENSTERN ..... Edward Petherbridge  
THE PLAYER ..... Graham Crowden  
TRAGEDIANS ..... Alan Adams, Oliver Cotton,  
Neil Fitzpatrick, Luke Hardy, Roger Kemp  
HAMLET ..... John McEnery  
OPHELIA ..... Caroline John  
CLAUDIUS ..... Kenneth MacKintosh  
GERTRUDE ..... Mary Griffiths  
POLONIUS ..... Peter Cellier  
FORTINBRAS ..... David Bailie  
HORATIO ..... David Hargreaves  
AMBASSADOR ..... David Ryall  
COURTIERS AND ATTENDANTS ..... David Bailie,  
Petronella Barker, David Belcher,  
Margo Cunningham, Denis de Marne,  
Kay Gailie, Reginald Green,  
David Hargreaves, William Hobbs,  
Richard Kay, Lee Menzies,  
Leonard Pearce, Ron Pember,  
Frederick Pyne, Maggie Riley,  
David Ryall, Christopher Timothy  
PLAYER-MUSICIANS ..... Lawrence Kennedy (flute),  
Laurie Morgan (drums),  
Stephen Nagy (oboe)  
OFFSTAGE MUSICIANS ..... Malcolm Hall, Edward Wilson

## **CHARACTERS**

ROSENCRANTZ

GUILDENSTERN

THE PLAYER

TRAGEDIANS

HAMLET

OPHELIA

CLAUDIUS

GERTRUDE

POLONIUS

FORTINBRAS

HORATIO

AMBASSADOR

COURTIERS, ATTENDANTS, SOLDIERS, MUSICIANS

The action takes place within and around the action of *Hamlet*.

# ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD

## ACT ONE

*Two Elizabethans passing the time in a place without any visible character.*

*They are well dressed—hats, cloaks, sticks and all. Each of them has a large leather money bag.*

*Guildenstern's bag is nearly empty.*

*Rosencrantz's bag is nearly full.*

*The reason being: they are betting on the toss of a coin, in the following manner: Guildenstern (hereafter "Guil") takes a coin out of his bag, spins it, letting it fall.*

*Rosencrantz (hereafter "Ros") studies it, announces it as "heads" (as it happens) and puts it into his own bag. Then they repeat the process. They have apparently been doing this for some time.*

*The run of "heads" is impossible, yet Ros betrays no surprise at all—he feels none. However, he is nice enough to feel a little embarrassed at taking so much money off his friend. Let that be his character note.*

*Guil is well alive to the oddity of it. He is not worried about the money, but he is worried by the implications; aware but not going to panic about it—his character note.*

*Guil sits. Ros stands (he does the moving, retrieving coins).*

*Guil spins. Ros studies coin.*

**ROS.** Heads.

*He picks it up and puts it in his bag. The process is repeated.*

Heads.

*Again.*

Heads.

*Again.*

Heads.

*Again.*

Heads.

**GUIL.** (*Flipping a coin.*) There is an art to the building up of suspense.

**ROS.** Heads.

**GUIL.** (*Flipping another.*) Though it can be done by luck alone.

**ROS.** Heads.

**GUIL.** If that's the word I'm after.

**ROS.** (*Raises his head at Guil.*) Seventy-six-love.

*Guil gets up but has nowhere to go. He spins another coin over his shoulder without looking at it, his attention being directed at his environment or lack of it.*

Heads.

**GUIL.** A weaker man might be moved to re-examine his faith, if in nothing else at least in the law of probability.

*He flips a coin over his shoulder as he goes to look upstage.*

**ROS.** Heads.

*Guil, examining the confines of the stage, flips over two more coins as he does so, one by one of course. Ros announces each of them as "heads."*

**GUIL.** (*Musing.*) The law of probability, it has been oddly asserted, is something to do with the proposition that if six monkeys (*He has surprised himself.*) ...if six monkeys were...

**ROS.** Game?

**GUIL.** Were they?

**ROS.** Are you?

**GUIL.** (*Understanding.*) Game. (*Flips a coin.*) The law of averages, if I have got this right, means that if six monkeys were thrown up in the air for long enough they would land on their tails about as often as they would land on their—

**ROS.** Heads. (*He picks up the coin.*)

**GUIL.** Which even at first glance does not strike one as a particularly rewarding speculation, in either sense, even without the monkeys. I mean you wouldn't *bet* on it. I mean *I* would, but *you* wouldn't... (*As he flips a coin.*)

**ROS.** Heads.

**GUIL.** Would you? (*Flips a coin.*)

**ROS.** Heads.

*Repeat.*

Heads. (*He looks up at Guil—embarrassed laugh.*) Getting a bit of a bore, isn't it?

**GUIL.** (*Coldly.*) A bore?

**ROS.** Well...

**GUIL.** What about the suspense?

**ROS.** (*Innocently.*) What suspense?

*Small pause.*

**GUIL.** It must be the law of diminishing returns...I feel the spell about to be broken. (*Energizing himself somewhat.*)

*He takes out a coin, spins it high, catches it, turns it over onto the back of his other hand, studies the coin—and tosses it to Ros. His energy deflates and he sits.*

Well, it was an even chance...if my calculations are correct.

**ROS.** Eighty-five in a row—beaten the record!

**GUIL.** Don't be absurd.

**ROS.** Easily!

**GUIL.** (*Angry.*) Is that *it*, then? Is that all?

**ROS.** What?

**GUIL.** A new record? Is that as far as you are prepared to go?

**ROS.** Well...

**GUIL.** No questions? Not even a pause?

**ROS.** You spun them yourself.

**GUIL.** Not a flicker of doubt?

**ROS.** (*Aggrieved, aggressive.*) Well. I won—didn't I?

**GUIL.** (*Approaches him—quieter.*) And if you'd lost? If they'd come down against you, eighty-five times, one after another, just like that?

**ROS.** (*Dumbly.*) Eighty-five in a row? *Tails?*

**GUIL.** Yes! What would you think?

**ROS.** (*Doubtfully.*) Well... (*Jocularly.*) Well, I'd have a good look at your coins for a start!

**GUIL.** (*Retiring.*) I'm relieved. At least we can still count on self-interest as a predictable factor...I suppose it's the last to go. Your capacity for trust made me wonder if perhaps...you, alone... (*He turns on him suddenly, reaches out a hand.*) Touch. (*Ros clasps his hand. Guil pulls him up to him. More intensely.*) We have been spinning coins together since— (*He releases him almost as violently.*) This is not the first time we have spun coins!

**ROS.** Oh no—we've been spinning coins for as long as I remember.

**GUIL.** How long is that?

**ROS.** I forget. Mind you—eighty-five times!

**GUIL.** Yes?

**ROS.** It'll take some beating, I imagine.

**GUIL.** Is *that* what you imagine? Is that it? No *fear*?

**ROS.** Fear?

**GUIL.** (*In fury—flings a coin on the ground.*) *Fear!* The crack that might flood your brain with light!

**ROS.** Heads... (*He puts it in his bag.*)

*Guil sits despondently. He takes a coin, spins it, lets it fall between his feet. He looks at it, picks it up, throws it to Ros, who puts it in his bag.*

*Guil takes another coin, spins it, catches it, turns it over onto his other hand, looks at it, and throws it to Ros, who puts it in his bag.*



*Guil takes a third coin, spins it, catches it in his right hand, turns it over onto his left wrist, lobs it in the air, catches it with his left hand, raises his left leg, throws the coin up under it, catches it and turns it over onto the top of his head, where it sits. Ros comes, looks at it, puts it in his bag.*

**ROS.** I'm afraid—

**GUIL.** So am I.

**ROS.** I'm afraid it isn't your day.

**GUIL.** I'm afraid it is.

*Small pause.*

**ROS.** Eighty-nine.

**GUIL.** It must be indicative of something, besides the redistribution of wealth. (*He muses.*) List of possible explanations.

One. I'm willing it. Inside where nothing shows, I am the essence of a man spinning double-headed coins, and betting against himself in private atonement for an unremembered past. (*He spins a coin at Ros.*)

**ROS.** Heads.

**GUIL.** Two. Time has stopped dead, and the single experience of one coin being spun once has been repeated ninety times... (*He flips a coin, looks at it, tosses it to Ros.*) On the whole, doubtful. Three. Divine intervention, that is to say, a good turn from above concerning him, cf. children of Israel, or retribution from above concerning me, cf. Lot's wife. Four. A spectacular vindication of the principle that each individual coin spun individually (*He spins one.*) is as likely to come down heads as tails and therefore should cause no surprise each individual time it does. (*It does. He tosses it to Ros.*)

**ROS.** I've never known anything like it!

**GUIL.** And a syllogism: One, he had never known anything like it. Two, he has never known anything to write home about. Three, it is nothing to write home about...Home...What's the first thing you remember?

**ROS.** Oh, let's see...The first thing that comes into my head, you mean?

**GUIL.** No—the first thing you remember.

**ROS.** Ah. (*Pause.*) No, it's no good, it's gone. It was a long time ago.

**GUIL.** (*Patient but edged.*) You don't get my meaning. What is the first thing after all the things you've forgotten?

**ROS.** Oh I see. (*Pause.*) I've forgotten the question. (*Guil leaps up and paces.*)

**GUIL.** Are you happy?

**ROS.** What?

**GUIL.** Content? At ease?

**ROS.** I suppose so.

**GUIL.** What are you going to do now?

**ROS.** I don't know. What do you want to do?

**GUIL.** I have no desires. None. (*He stops pacing dead.*) There was a messenger...that's right. We were sent for. (*He wheels at Ros and raps out—*) Syllogism the second: one, probability is a factor which operates within natural forces. Two, probability is not operating as a factor. Three, we are now within un-, sub- or supernatural forces. Discuss. (*Ros is suitably startled—Acidly.*) Not too heatedly.

**ROS.** I'm sorry I—What's the matter with you?

**GUIL.** The scientific approach to the examination of phenomena is a defence against the pure emotion of fear. Keep tight hold and continue while there's time. Now—counter to the previous syllogism: tricky one, follow me carefully, it may prove a comfort. If we postulate, and we just have, that within un-, sub- or supernatural forces *the probability is* that the law of probability will not operate as a factor, then we must accept that the probability of the *first* part will not operate as a factor, in which case the law of probability *will* operate as a factor within un-, sub- or supernatural forces. And since it obviously hasn't been doing so, we can take it that we are not held within un-, sub- or supernatural forces after all; in all probability, that is. Which is a great relief to me personally. (*Small pause.*) Which is all very well, except that— (*He continues with tight hysteria, under control.*) We have been spinning coins together since I don't know when, and in all that time (if it *is* all that time) I don't suppose either of us was more than a couple of gold pieces up

or down. I hope that doesn't sound surprising because its very unsurprisingness is something I am trying to keep hold of. The equanimity of your average tosser of coins depends upon the law, or rather a tendency, or let us say a probability, or at any rate a mathematically calculable chance, which ensures that he will not upset himself by losing too much nor upset his opponent by winning too often. This made for a kind of harmony and a kind of confidence. It related the fortuitous and the ordained into a reassuring union which we recognized as nature. The sun came up about as often as it went down, in the long run, and a coin showed heads about as often as it showed tails. Then a messenger arrived. We had been sent for. Nothing else happened. Ninety-two coins spun consecutively have come down heads ninety-two consecutive times...and for the last three minutes on the wind of a windless day I have heard the sound of drums and flute...

**ROS.** (*Cutting his fingernails.*) Another curious scientific phenomenon is the fact that the fingernails grow after death, as does the beard.

**GUIL.** What?

**ROS.** (*Loud.*) Beard!

**GUIL.** But you're not dead.

**ROS.** (*Irritated.*) I didn't say they *started* to grow after death! (*Pause, calmer.*) The fingernails also grow before birth, though *not* the beard.

**GUIL.** *What?*

**ROS.** (*Shouts.*) Beard! What's the matter with you? (*Reflectively.*) The toenails, on the other hand, never grow at all.

**GUIL.** (*Bemused.*) The toenails on the other hand never grow at all?

**ROS.** Do they? It's a funny thing—I cut my fingernails all the time, and every time I think to cut them, they need cutting. Now, for instance. And yet, I never, to the best of my knowledge, cut my toenails. They ought to be curled under my feet by now, but it doesn't happen. I never think about them. Perhaps I cut them absent-mindedly, when I'm thinking of something else.

**GUIL.** (*Tensed up by this rambling.*) Do you remember the first thing that happened today?

**ROS.** (*Promptly.*) I woke up, I suppose. (*Triggered.*) Oh—I've got it now—that man, a foreigner, he woke us up—

**GUIL.** A messenger. (*He relaxes, sits.*)

**ROS.** That's it—pale sky before dawn, a man standing on his saddle to bang on the shutters—shouts—What's all the row about?! Clear off!—But then he called our names. You remember that—this man woke us up.

**GUIL.** Yes.

**ROS.** We were sent for.

**GUIL.** Yes.

**ROS.** That's why we're here. (*He looks round, seems doubtful, then the explanation.*) Travelling.

**GUIL.** Yes.

**ROS.** (*Dramatically.*) It was urgent—a matter of extreme urgency, a royal summons, his very words: official business and no questions asked—lights in the stableyard, saddle up and off headlong and hotfoot across the land, our guides outstripped in breakneck pursuit of our duty! Fearful lest we come too late!! (*Small pause.*)

**GUIL.** Too late for what?

**ROS.** How do I know? We haven't got there yet.

**GUIL.** Then what are we doing here, I ask myself.

**ROS.** You might well ask.

**GUIL.** We better get on.

**ROS.** You might well think.

**GUIL.** We better get on.

**ROS.** (*Actively.*) Right! (*Pause.*) On where?

**GUIL.** Forward.

**ROS.** (*Forward to footlights.*) Ah. (*Hesitates.*) Which way do we—(*He turns round.*) Which way did we—?

**GUIL.** Practically starting from scratch...An awakening, a man standing on his saddle to bang on the shutters, our names shouted in a certain dawn, a message, a summons...A new record for heads and tails. We have not been...picked out...simply to be abandoned...

set loose to find our own way... We are entitled to some direction... I would have thought.

**ROS.** (*Alert, listening.*) I say—! I say—

**GUIL.** Yes?

**ROS.** I can hear—I thought I heard—music.

*Guil raises himself.*

**GUIL.** Yes?

**ROS.** Like a band. (*He looks around, laughs embarrassedly, expiating himself.*) It sounded like—a band. Drums.

**GUIL.** Yes.

**ROS.** (*Relaxes.*) It couldn't have been real.

**GUIL.** “The colours red, blue and green are real. The colour yellow is a mystical experience shared by everybody”—demolish.

**ROS.** (*At edge of stage.*) It must have been thunder. Like drums...

*By the end of the next speech, the band is faintly audible.*

**GUIL.** A man breaking his journey between one place and another at a third place of no name, character, population or significance, sees a unicorn cross his path and disappear. That in itself is startling, but there are precedents for mystical encounters of various kinds or, to be less extreme, a choice of persuasions to put it down to fancy; until—“My God,” says a second man, “I must be dreaming, I thought I saw a unicorn.” At which point, a dimension is added that makes the experience as alarming as it will ever be. A third witness, you understand, adds no further dimension but only spreads it thinner, and a fourth thinner still, and the more witnesses there are the thinner it gets and the more reasonable it becomes until it is as thin as reality, the name we give to the common experience... “Look, look!” recites the crowd. “A horse with an arrow in its forehead! It must have been mistaken for a deer.”

**ROS.** (*Eagerly.*) I knew all along it was a band.

**GUIL.** (*Tiredly.*) He knew all along it was a band.

**ROS.** Here they come!

**GUIL.** (*At the last moment before they enter—wistfully.*) I'm sorry it wasn't a unicorn. It would have been nice to have unicorns.

*The Tragedians are six in number, including a small boy (Alfred). Two pull and push a cart piled with props and belongings. There is also a Drummer, a Horn-Player and a Flautist. The Spokesman ("the Player") has no instrument. He brings up the rear and is the first to notice them.*

**PLAYER.** Halt!

*The Group turns and halts.*

*(Joyously.)* An audience!

*Ros and Guil half rise.*

Don't move!

*They sink back. He regards them fondly.*

Perfect! A lucky thing we came along.

**ROS.** For us?

**PLAYER.** Let us hope so. But to meet two gentlemen on the road—we would not hope to meet them off it.

**ROS.** No?

**PLAYER.** Well met, in fact, and just in time.

**ROS.** Why's that?

**PLAYER.** Why, we grow rusty and you catch us at the very point of decadence—by this time tomorrow we might have forgotten everything we ever knew. That's a thought, isn't it? *(He laughs generously.)* We'd be back where we started—improvising.

**ROS.** Tumblers, are you?

**PLAYER.** We can give you a tumble if that's your taste, and times being what they are... Otherwise, for a jingle of coin we can do you a selection of gory romances, full of fine cadence and corpses, pirated from the Italian; and it doesn't take much to make a jingle—even a single coin has music in it.

*They all flourish and bow, raggedly.*

Tragedians, at your command.

*Ros and Guil have got to their feet.*

**ROS.** My name is Guildenstern, and this is Rosencrantz. *(Guil confers briefly with him.)*

(*Without embarrassment.*) I'm sorry—*his* name's Guildenstern, and I'm Rosencrantz.

**PLAYER.** A pleasure. We've played to bigger, of course, but quality counts for something. I recognized you at once—

**ROS.** And who are we?

**PLAYER.** —as fellow artists.

**ROS.** I thought we were gentlemen.

**PLAYER.** For some of us it is performance, for others, patronage. They are two sides of the same coin, or, let us say, being as there are so many of us, the same side of two coins. (*Bows again.*) Don't clap too loudly—it's a very old world.

**ROS.** What is your line?

**PLAYER.** Tragedy, sir. Deaths and disclosures, universal and particular, denouements both unexpected and inexorable, transvestite melodrama on all levels including the suggestive. We transport you into a world of intrigue and illusion...clowns, if you like, murderers—we can do you ghosts and battles, on the skirmish level, heroes, villains, tormented lovers—set pieces in the poetic vein; we can do you rapiers or rape or both, by all means, faithless wives and ravished virgins—flagrante delicto at a price, but that comes under realism for which there are special terms. Getting warm, am I?

**ROS.** (*Doubtfully.*) Well, I don't know...

**PLAYER.** It costs little to watch, and little more if you happen to get caught up in the action, if that's your taste and times being what they are.

**ROS.** What are they?

**PLAYER.** Indifferent.

**ROS.** Bad?

**PLAYER.** Wicked. Now what precisely is your pleasure? (*He turns to the Tragedians.*) Gentlemen, disport yourselves. (*The Tragedians shuffle into some kind of line.*) There! See anything you like?

**ROS.** (*Doubtful, innocent.*) What do they do?

**PLAYER.** Let your imagination run riot. They are beyond surprise.

**ROS.** And how much?

**PLAYER.** To take part?

**ROS.** To watch.

**PLAYER.** Watch what?

**ROS.** A private performance.

**PLAYER.** How private?

**ROS.** Well, there are only two of us. Is that enough?

**PLAYER.** For an audience, disappointing. For voyeurs, about average.

**ROS.** What's the difference?

**PLAYER.** Ten guilders.

**ROS.** (*Horried.*) Ten *guilders!*

**PLAYER.** I mean eight.

**ROS.** Together?

**PLAYER.** Each. I don't think you understand—

**ROS.** What are you *saying?*

**PLAYER.** What am I saying—seven.

**ROS.** Where have you *been?*

**PLAYER.** Roundabout. A nest of children carries the custom of the town. Juvenile companies, they are the fashion. But they cannot match our repertoire...we'll stoop to anything if that's your bent...

*He regards Ros meaningfully but Ros returns the stare blankly.*

**ROS.** They'll grow up.

**PLAYER.** (*Giving up.*) There's one born every minute. (*To Tragedians.*) On-ward!

*The Tragedians start to resume their burdens and their journey.  
Guil stirs himself at last.*

**GUIL.** Where are you going?

**PLAYER.** Ha-alt!

*They halt and turn.*

Home, sir.

**GUIL.** Where from?



**PLAYER.** Home. We're travelling people. We take our chances where we find them.

**GUIL.** It was chance, then?

**PLAYER.** Chance?

**GUIL.** You found us.

**PLAYER.** Oh yes.

**GUIL.** You were looking?

**PLAYER.** Oh no.

**GUIL.** Chance, then.

**PLAYER.** Or fate.

**GUIL.** Yours or ours?

**PLAYER.** It could hardly be one without the other.

**GUIL.** Fate, then.

**PLAYER.** Oh yes. We have no control. Tonight we play to the court. Or the night after. Or to the tavern. Or not.

**GUIL.** Perhaps I can use my influence.

**PLAYER.** At the tavern?

**GUIL.** At the court. I would say I have some influence.

**PLAYER.** Would you say so?

**GUIL.** I have influence yet.

**PLAYER.** Yet what?

*Guil seizes the Player violently.*

**GUIL.** I have influence!

*The Player does not resist. Guil loosens his hold.*

*(More calmly.)* You said something—about getting caught up in the action—

**PLAYER.** *(Gaily freeing himself.)* I did!—I did!—You're quicker than your friend... *(Confidingly.)* Now for a handful of guilders I happen to have a private and uncut performance of the Rape of the Sabine Women—or rather woman, or rather Alfred— *(Over his shoulder.)* Get your skirt on, Alfred—

*The Boy starts struggling into a female robe.*

...and for eight you can participate.

*Guil backs, Player follows.*

...taking either part.

*Guil backs.*

...or both for ten.

*Guil tries to turn away. Player holds his sleeve.*

...with encores—

*Guil smashes the Player across the face. The Player recoils.*

*Guil stands trembling.*

*(Resigned and quiet.)* Get your skirt off, Alfred...

*Alfred struggles out of his half-on robe.*

**GUIL.** *(Shaking with rage and fright.)* It could have been—it didn't have to be *obscene*...It could have been—a bird out of season, dropping bright-feathered on my shoulder...It could have been a tongueless dwarf standing by the road to point the way...I was *prepared*. But it's this, is it? No enigma, no dignity, nothing classical, portentous, only this—a comic pornographer and a rabble of prostitutes...

**PLAYER.** *(Acknowledging the description with a sweep of his hat, bowing; sadly.)* You should have caught us in better times. We were purists then. *(Straightens up.)* On-ward.

*The Players make to leave.*

**ROS.** *(His voice has changed: he has caught on.)* Excuse me!

**PLAYER.** Ha-alt!

*They halt.*

A-al-l-fred!

*Alfred resumes the struggle. The Player comes forward.*

**ROS.** You're not—ah—exclusively players, then?

**PLAYER.** We're inclusively players, sir.

**ROS.** So you give—exhibitions?

**PLAYER.** Performances, sir.

**ROS.** Yes, of course. There's more money in that, is there?

**PLAYER.** There's more trade, sir.

**ROS.** Times being what they are.

**PLAYER.** Yes.

**ROS.** Indifferent.

**PLAYER.** Completely.

**ROS.** You know I'd no idea—

**PLAYER.** No.

**ROS.** I mean, I've *heard* of—but I've never actually—

**PLAYER.** No.

**ROS.** I mean, what exactly do you *do*?

**PLAYER.** We keep to our usual stuff, more or less, only inside out. We do on stage the things that are supposed to happen off. Which is a kind of integrity, if you look on every exit being an entrance somewhere else.

**ROS.** (*Nervy, loud.*) Well, I'm not really the type of man who—no, but don't hurry off—sit down and tell us about some of the things people ask you to do— (*The Player turns away.*)

**PLAYER.** On-ward!

**ROS.** Just a minute!

*They turn and look at him without expression.*

Well, all right—I wouldn't mind seeing—just an idea of the kind of— (*Bravely.*) What will you do for that? (*And tosses a single coin on the ground between them. The Player spits at the coin, from where he stands. The Tragedians demur, trying to get at the coin. He kicks and cuffs them back.*)

**PLAYER.** On!

*Alfred is still half in and out of his robe. The Player cuffs him.*

(*To Alfred.*) What are you playing at?

*Ros is shamed into fury.*

**ROS.** Filth! Disgusting—I'll report you to the authorities—*perverts!* I know your game all right, it's all filth!

*The Players are about to leave. Guil has remained detached.*

**GUIL.** (*Casually.*) Do you like a bet?

*The Tragedians turn and look interested. The Player comes forward.*

**PLAYER.** What kind of bet did you have in mind?

*Guil walks half the distance towards the Player, stops with his foot over the coin.*

**GUIL.** Double or quits.

**PLAYER.** Well...heads.

*Guil raises his foot. The Player bends. The Tragedians crowd round. Relief and congratulations. The Player picks up the coin. Guil throws him a second coin.*

**GUIL.** Again?

*Some of the Tragedians are for it, others against.*

Evens.

*The Player nods and tosses the coin.*

Heads.

*It is. He picks it up.*

Again.

*Guil spins coin.*

**PLAYER.** Heads.

*It is. The Player picks up coin. He has two coins again. He spins one.*

**GUIL.** Heads.

*It is. Guil picks it up. Then tosses it immediately.*

**PLAYER.** *(Fractional hesitation.)* Tails.

*But it's heads. Guil picks it up. The Player tosses down his last coin by way of paying up, and turns away. Guil doesn't pick it up; he puts his foot on it.*

**GUIL.** Heads.

**PLAYER.** No!

*Pause. The Tragedians are against this.*

*(Apologetically.)* They don't like the odds.

**GUIL.** *(Lifts his foot, squats; picks up the coin still squatting; looks up.)*

You were right—heads. (*Spins it, slaps his hand on it, on the floor.*)  
Heads I win.

**PLAYER.** No.

**GUIL.** (*Uncovers coin.*) Right again. (*Repeat.*) Heads I win.

**PLAYER.** No.

**GUIL.** (*Uncovers coin.*) And right again. (*Repeat.*) Heads I win.

**PLAYER.** *No!*

*He turns away, the Tragedians with him. Guil stands up, comes close.*

**GUIL.** Would you believe it? (*Stands back, relaxes, smiles.*) Bet me the year of my birth doubled is an odd number.

**PLAYER.** *Your birth—!*

**GUIL.** If you don't trust me don't bet with me.

**PLAYER.** Would you trust *me*?

**GUIL.** *Bet me then.*

**PLAYER.** My birth?

**GUIL.** Odd numbers you win.

**PLAYER.** You're on—

*The Tragedians have come forward, wide awake.*

**GUIL.** Good. Year of your birth. Double it. Even numbers I win, odd numbers I lose.

*Silence. An awful sigh as the Tragedians realize that any number doubled is even. Then a terrible row as they object. Then a terrible silence.*

**PLAYER.** We have no money.

*Guil turns to him.*

**GUIL.** Ah. Then what *have* you got?

*The Player silently brings Alfred forward. Guil regards Alfred sadly.*

Was it for this?

**PLAYER.** It is the best we've got.

**GUIL.** (*Looking up and around.*) Then the times are bad indeed.

*The Player starts to speak, protestation, but Guil turns on him viciously.*

The very air stinks.

*The Player moves back. Guil moves down to the footlights and turns.*

Come here, Alfred.

*Alfred moves down and stands, frightened and small.*

(Gently.) Do you lose often?

**ALFRED.** Yes, sir.

**GUIL.** Then what could you have left to lose?

**ALFRED.** Nothing, sir.

*Pause. Guil regards him.*

**GUIL.** Do you like being...an actor?

**ALFRED.** No, sir.

*Guil looks around, at the audience.*

**GUIL.** You and I, Alfred—we could create a dramatic precedent here.

*And Alfred, who has been near to tears, starts to sniffle.*

Come, come, Alfred, this is no way to fill the theatres of Europe.

*The Player has moved down, to remonstrate with Alfred. Guil cuts him off again.*

(Viciously.) Do you know any good plays?

**PLAYER.** Plays?

**ROS.** (Coming forward, faltering shyly.) Exhibitions...

**GUIL.** I thought you said you were actors.

**PLAYER.** (Dawning.) Oh. Oh well, we *are*. We are. But there hasn't been much call—

**GUIL.** You lost. Well then—one of the Greeks, perhaps? You're familiar with the tragedies of antiquity, are you? The great homicidal classics? Matri, patri, fratri, sorori, uxori and it goes without saying—

**ROS.** Saucy—

**GUIL.** —Suicidal—hm? Maidens aspiring to godheads—

**ROS.** And vice versa—

**GUIL.** Your kind of thing, is it?

**PLAYER.** Well, no, I can't say it is, really. We're more of the blood, love and rhetoric school.

**GUIL.** Well, I'll leave the choice to you, if there is anything to choose between them.

**PLAYER.** They're hardly divisible, sir—well, I can do you blood and love without the rhetoric, and I can do you blood and rhetoric without the love, and I can do you all three concurrent or consecutive, but I can't do you love and rhetoric without the blood. Blood is compulsory—they're all blood, you see.

**GUIL.** Is that what people want?

**PLAYER.** It's what we do.

*Small pause. He turns away. Guil touches Alfred on the shoulder.*

**GUIL.** (*Wry, gentle.*) Thank you; we'll let you know.

*The Player has moved upstage. Alfred follows.*

**PLAYER.** (*To Tragedians.*) Thirty-eight!

**ROS.** (*Moving across, fascinated and hopeful.*) Position?

**PLAYER.** Sir?

**ROS.** One of your—tableaux?

**PLAYER.** No, sir.

**ROS.** Oh.

**PLAYER.** (*To the Tragedians, now departing with their cart, already taking various props off it.*) Entrances there and there. (*Indicating upstage.*)

*The Player has not moved his position for his last four lines. He does not move now. Guil waits.*

**GUIL.** Well...aren't you going to change into your costume?

**PLAYER.** I never change out of it, sir.

**GUIL.** Always in character.

**PLAYER.** That's it.

*Pause.*

**GUIL.** Aren't you going to—come on?

**PLAYER.** I am on.

**GUIL.** But if you are on, you can't come on. Can you?

**PLAYER.** I start on.

**GUIL.** But it hasn't started. Go on. We'll look out for you.

**PLAYER.** I'll give you a wave.

*He does not move. His immobility is now pointed, and getting awkward. Pause. Ros walks up to him till they are face to face.*

**ROS.** Excuse me.

*Pause. The Player lifts his downstage foot. It was covering Guil's coin. Ros puts his foot on the coin. Smiles.*

Thank you.

*The Player turns and goes. Ros has bent for the coin.*

**GUIL.** (Moving out.) Come on.

**ROS.** I say—that was lucky.

**GUIL.** (Turning.) What?

**ROS.** It was tails.

*He tosses the coin to Guil, who catches it.*

*Simultaneously—a lighting change sufficient to alter the exterior mood into interior, but nothing violent. And Ophelia runs on in some alarm, holding up her skirts—followed by Hamlet.*

*Ophelia has been sewing and she holds the garment. They are both mute. Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced, no hat upon his head, his stockings fouled, ungartered and down-gyved to his ankle, pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other...and with a look so piteous, he takes her by the wrist and holds her hard, then he goes to the length of his arm, and with his other hand over his brow, falls to such perusal of her face as he would draw it...At last, with a little shaking of his arm, and thrice his head waving up and down, he raises a sigh so piteous and profound that it does seem to shatter all his bulk and end his being. That done he lets her go, and with his head over his shoulder turned, he*



*goes out backwards without taking his eyes off her...she runs off in the opposite direction.*

*Ros and Guil have frozen. Guil unfreezes first. He jumps at Ros.*

**GUIL.** Come on!

*But a flourish—enter Claudius and Gertrude, attended.*

**CLAUDIUS.** Welcome, dear Rosencrantz... *(He raises a hand at Guil while Ros bows—Guil bows late and hurriedly.)* ...and Guildenstern.

*He raises a hand at Ros while Guil bows to him—Ros is still straightening up from his previous bow and halfway up he bows down again. With his head down, he twists to look at Guil, who is on the way up.*

Moreover that we did much long to see you,  
the need we have to use you did provoke  
our hasty sending.

*Ros and Guil still adjusting their clothing for Claudius's presence.*

Something have you heard  
Of Hamlet's transformation, so call it,  
Sith nor th'exterior nor the inward man  
Resembles that it was. What it should be,  
More than his father's death, that thus hath put him,  
So much from th'understanding of himself,  
I cannot dream of. I entreat you both  
That, being of so young days brought up with him  
And sith so neighboured to his youth and haviour  
That you vouchsafe your rest here in our court  
Some little time, so by your companies  
To draw him on to pleasures, and to gather  
So much as from occasion you may glean,  
Whether aught to us unknown afflicts him thus,  
That opened lies within our remedy.

**GERTRUDE.** Good *(Fractional suspense.)* gentlemen... *(They both bow.)*

He hath much talked of you,

And sure I am, two men there is not living  
To whom he more adheres. If it will please you  
To show us so much gentry and goodwill  
As to expand your time with us awhile  
For the supply and profit of our hope,  
Your visitation shall receive such thanks  
As fits a king's remembrance.

**ROS.** Both your majesties  
Might, by the sovereign power you have of us,  
Put your dread pleasures more into command  
Than to entreaty.

**GUIL.** We both obey,  
And here give up ourselves in the full bent  
To lay our service freely at your feet,  
To be commanded.

**CLAUDIUS.** Thanks, Rosencrantz (*Turning to Ros, who is caught unprepared, while Guil bows.*) and gentle Guildenstern. (*Turning to Guil, who is bent double.*)

**GERTRUDE.** (*Correcting.*) Thanks, Guildenstern (*Turning to Ros, who bows as Guil checks upward movements to bow too—both bent double, squinting at each other.*) ...and gentle Rosencrantz. (*Turning to Guil, both straightening up—Guil checks again and bows again.*)

And I beseech you instantly to visit  
My too much changed son. Go, some of you,  
And bring these gentlemen where Hamlet is.

*Two Attendants exit backwards, indicating that Ros and Guil should follow.*

**GUIL.** Heaven make our presence and our practices  
Pleasant and helpful to him.

**GERTRUDE.** Ay, amen!

*Ros and Guil move towards a downstage wing. Before they get there, Polonius enters. They stop and bow to him. He nods and hurries upstage to Claudius. They turn to look at him.*

**POLONIUS.** The ambassadors from Norway, my good lord, are joyfully returned.

**The play doesn't end here...**

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