

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD

ACT ONE

*Two Elizabethans passing 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 it 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 money bag. The process is repeated.*

Heads.

Again.

**Ros Heads.**

Again.

Heads.

Again.

Heads.

ACTE I

*Deux Élisabéthains passent le temps en un lieu ne présentant aucun caractère particulier.*

*Ils sont bien habillés – chapeaux, capes, cannes et tout.*

*Chacun d'eux a une grande bourse en cuir.*

*La bourse de Guildenstern est presque vide ; celle de Rosencrantz, presque pleine.*

*La raison en est qu'ils jouent à pile ou face de la façon suivante : Guildenstern (par la suite « Guil ») tire de sa bourse une pièce, la lance en l'air et la laisse retomber. Rosencrantz (par la suite « Ros ») l'examine, déclare « face » (ce qui est le cas) et la met dans sa bourse. Puis ils répètent le processus. Ils semblent faire ça depuis un bon moment.*

*Bien qu'une telle série de « face » soit impossible, Ros ne trahit pas la moindre surprise – il n'en ressent aucune. Néanmoins, il est assez gentil pour ressentir une certaine gêne à soutirer autant d'argent à son ami. Que ceci dénote son trait de caractère.*

*Guil est bien conscient de la bizarrerie de la chose. Ce qui le préoccupe, ce n'est pas l'argent, ce sont les implications. Conscient donc, mais sans se mettre à paniquer pour autant – son trait de caractère.*

*Guil est assis, Ros debout (c'est lui qui se déplace pour récupérer les pièces). Guil lance une pièce. Ros l'examine.*

**Ros** Face.

*Il ramasse la pièce et la met dans sa bourse. Le processus se répète.*

Face.

*Encore.*

**Ros** Face.

*Encore.*

Face.

*Encore.*

Face.

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD

**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 slips 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** (*musings*) The law of probability, as it has been oddly asserted, is something to do with the proposition that if six monkeys (*he has surprised himself*)... if six monkeys were...<sup>1</sup>

**Ros** Game?

**Guil** Were they?

**Ros** Are you?

**Guil** (*understanding*) Games. (*Flips a coin.*) The law of averages<sup>2</sup>, 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.*)

ROSENCRANTZ ET GULDENSTERN SONT MORTS

**Guil** (*lançant une pièce*) C'est tout un art, de faire monter le suspense.

**Ros** Face.

**Guil** (*lançant une autre pièce*) À moins que ce ne soit un pur coup de chance.

**Ros** Face.

**Guil** Si tel est bien le mot que je cherche.

**Ros** (*relevant la tête vers Guil*) Soixante-seize à zéro.

*Guil se lève mais n'a nulle part où aller. Il lance une autre pièce par-dessus son épaule sans la regarder en portant son attention sur son environnement, ou plutôt sur l'absence de celui-ci.*

Face.

**Guil** Un homme moins aguéri en viendrait peut-être à reconsidérer sa foi ne serait-ce qu'en la théorie des probabilités, à défaut d'autre chose.

*Il laisse tomber une pièce par-dessus son épaule en allant voir à l'arrière-scène.*

**Ros** Face.

*Tout en examinant les confins de la scène, Guil lance deux autres pièces, une à la fois bien sûr. Pour chacune d'elles, Ros déclare « face ».*

**Guil** (*songeur*) La théorie des probabilités, selon une bizarre assertion, a matière à voir avec la proposition selon laquelle si six singes (*Il se surprend lui-même*)... si on jetait six singes...

**Ros** On joue ?

**Guil** En joue ?

**Ros** Quelle joue ?

**Guil** (*comprenant*) On joue. (*Il lance une pièce.*) La loi des probabilités, si je ne m'abuse, implique que si on jetait en l'air six singes pendant assez longtemps, ils retomberaient à peu près autant de fois sur leur queue que sur leur –

**Ros** Face. (*Il ramasse la pièce.*)

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD

**Guil** Which 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 suspense?

**Ros** (*innocently*) What suspense?

*Small pause.*

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

*He takes out a coin, spins it high, catches it, turns it over on to 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 the *it*, then? Is that all?

**Ros** What?

**Guil** A new record? Is that as far as you prepared to go?