

fully.) 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.)

Start

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. MUSIC CUE B.) 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.*)

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, ruthless wives and ravished virgins—*flagrante delicto* at a price, but that comes under realism for which there are special terms. Get'ing 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 TRAGEDIANE.*) Gentlemen, disport yourselves. (*The TRAGEDIANE 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.

End