

Rosencrantz, Guildenstern

**Ros.** (*Cutting his fingernails.*) Another curious scientific phenomenon is 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 absentmindedly, 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

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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 around, 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 stable-yard, 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.