

Player (Rosencrantz, Guildenstern)

**Ros.** So you've caught on.

**Guil.** So you've caught up.

**Player.** (*Tops.*) Not yet! (*Bitterly.*) You left us.

**Ros.** Ah! I'd forgotten—you performed a dramatic spectacle on the road. Yes, I'm sorry we had to miss it.

**Player.** (*Bursts out.*) We can't look each other in the face! (*Pause, more in control.*) You don't understand the humiliation of it—to be tricked out of the single assumption which makes our existence viable—that somebody is *watching*.... (*Lost.*) There we were—demented children mincing about in clothes that no one ever wore, speaking as no man ever spoke, swearing love in wigs and rhymed couplets, killing each other with wooden swords, hollow protestations of faith hurled after empty promises of vengeance—and every gesture, every pose, vanishing into the thin unpopulated air. We ransomed our dignity to the clouds, and the uncomprehending birds listened. (*He rounds on them.*) Don't you see?! We're *actors*—we're the opposite of people! (*They recoil nonplussed, his voice calms.*) Think, in your head, *now*, think of the most... *private*... *secret*... *intimate* thing you've ever done secure in the knowledge of its privacy.... (*He gives them—and the audience—a good pause. Ros takes on a shifty look.*) Are you thinking of it? (*He strikes with his voice and his head.*) Well, *I saw you do it!*

**Ros.** (*He leaps up, dissembling madly.*) You never! It's a lie! (*He catches himself with a giggle in a vacuum and sits down again.*)

**Player:** We're actors... We pledged our identities, secure in the conventions of our trade, that someone would be watching. And then, gradually, no one was. We were caught, high and dry. It

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was not until the murderer's long soliloquy that we were able to look around; frozen as we were in profile, our eyes searched you out, first confidently, then desperately as each patch of turf, uninhabited, and all the while the murderous King addressed the horizon with his dreary interminable guilt.... Our heads began to move, wary as lizards, the corpse of unsullied Rosalinda peeped through his fingers, and the King faltered. Even then, habit and a stubborn trust that our audience spied upon us from behind the nearest bush, forced our bodies to blunder on long after they had emptied of meaning, until like runaway carts they dragged to a halt. No one came forward. No one shouted at us. The silence was unbreakable, it imposed itself upon us; it was obscene. We took off our crowns and swords and cloth of gold and moved silent on the road to Elsinore.