

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?

START

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 . . .

STOP

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.