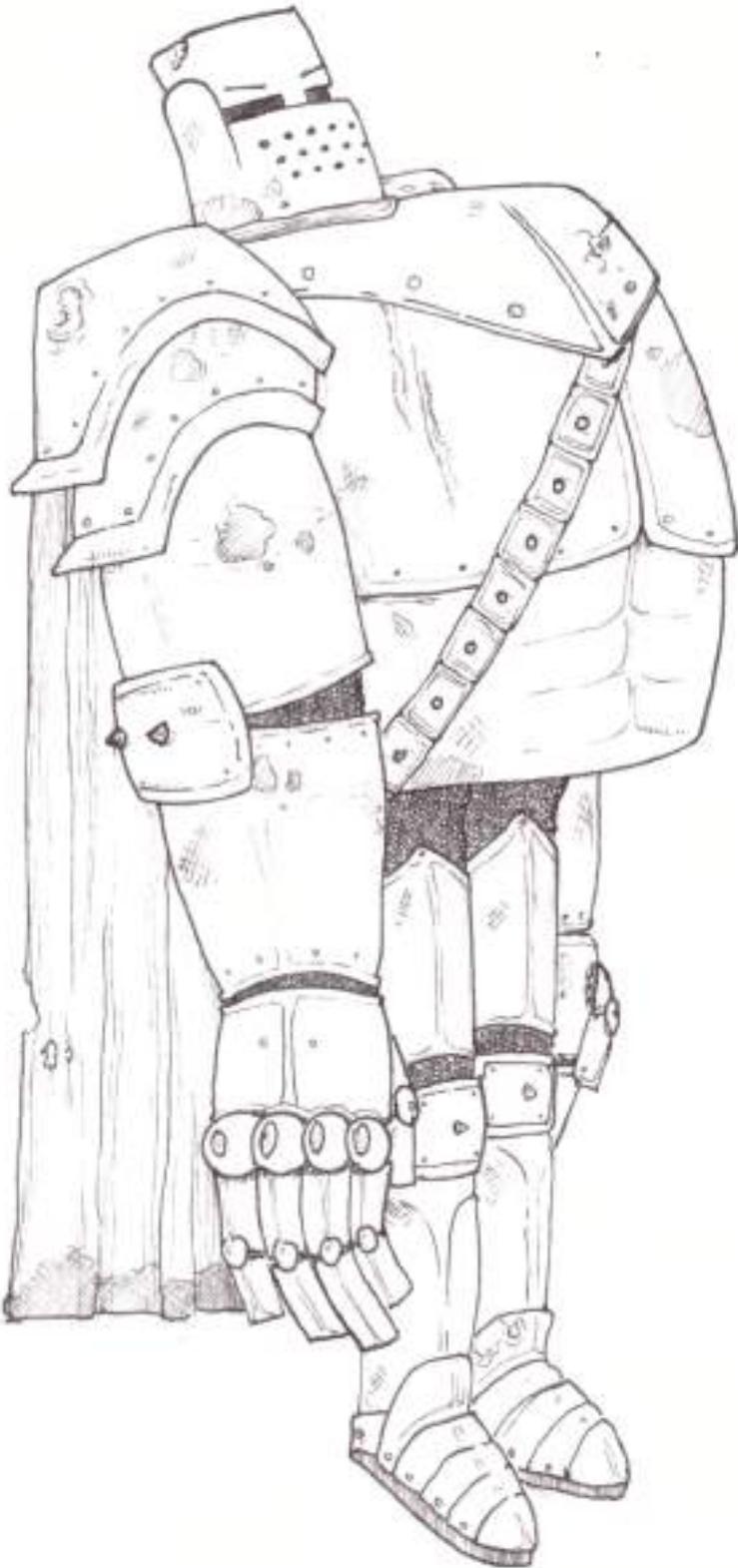


SIR **L**AUNFAL

Knights can come in many different shapes and sizes in the kingdom of Camelot. To simplify these types I've come up with this category system:



Category 1:

I call these the 'Cod-Brained': big, brutish knights who have the amazing ability to carve a straight line through a battlefield. They are gigantic; chosen for their prowess in battle, but not for their intelligence, having been known to misinterpret the simplest of orders. Their strength is only matched by their sheer, dim-witted bravery. That and their uncanny ability to avoid bathing, using smell as an advanced fighting technique. Do not, I repeat, do *not* allow anywhere near battle planning. Avoid at all cost.

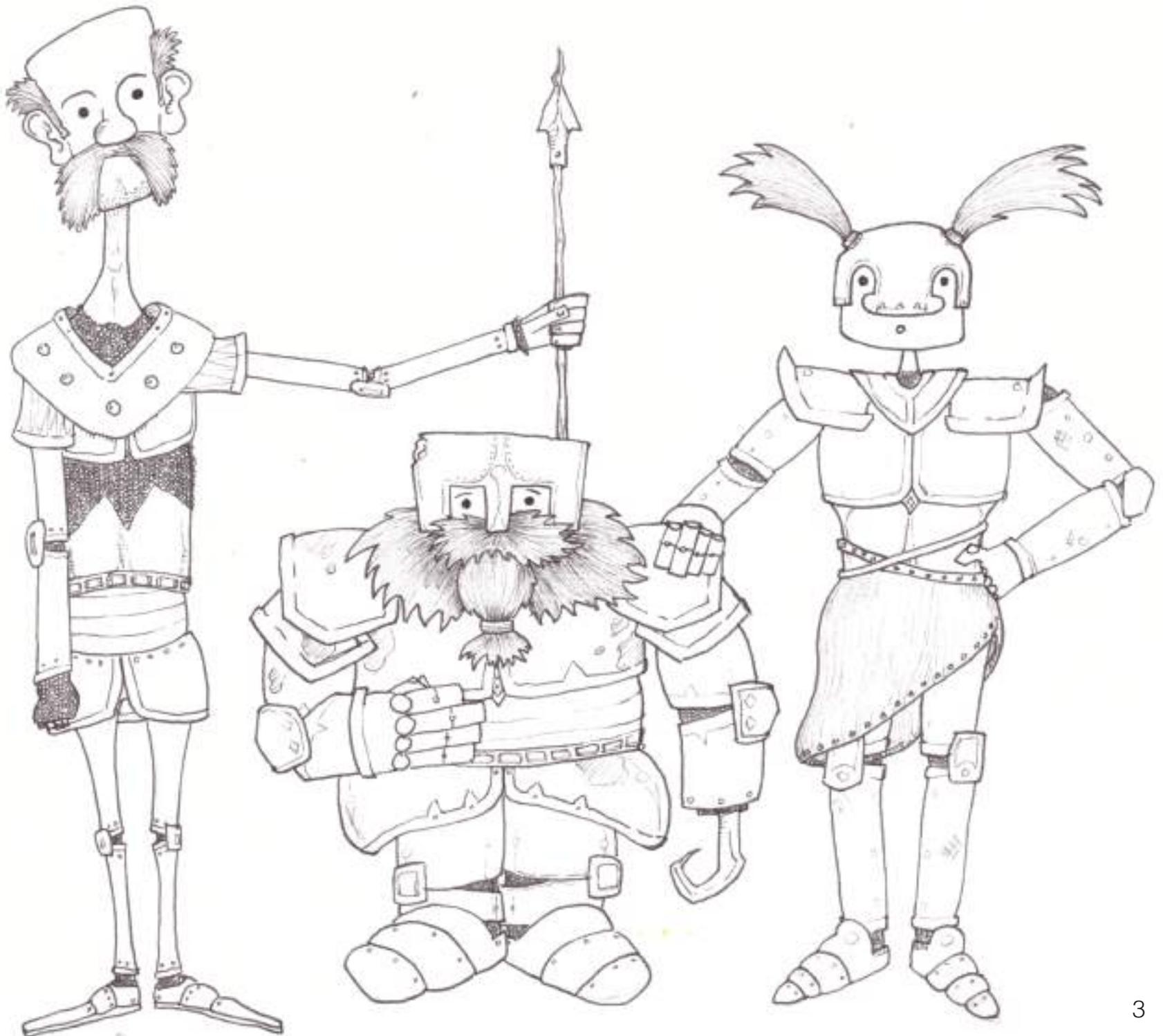
Category 2:

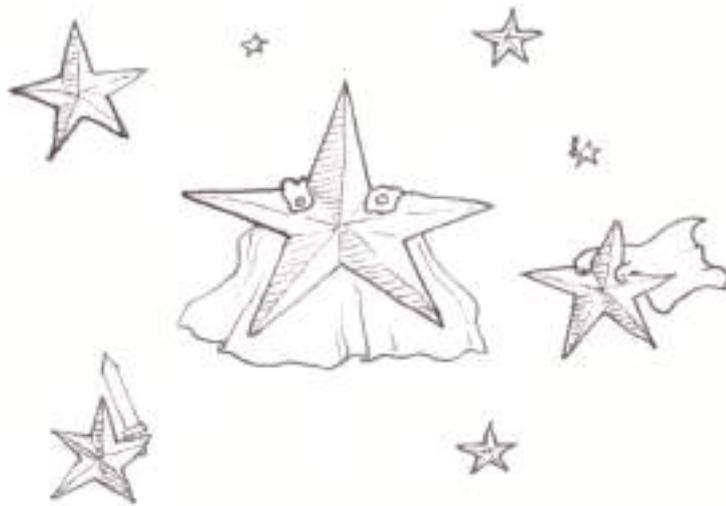
The 'Sleeve-Hearts' are a funny bunch. Depending on what you want them to do they can either be the bravest, surpassing even the Cod-Brained, or the most pathetic bunch of knights out there. They are prone to easy infatuation, with pretty much anyone. If their quest were, for example, to save a pretty damsel in distress then they would have it done before the day is out. If they were asked to save a village of hardy fishermen then, well, expect them to get conveniently lost along the way. Avoid at all cost, especially when asked to listen to their poetry.



Category 3:

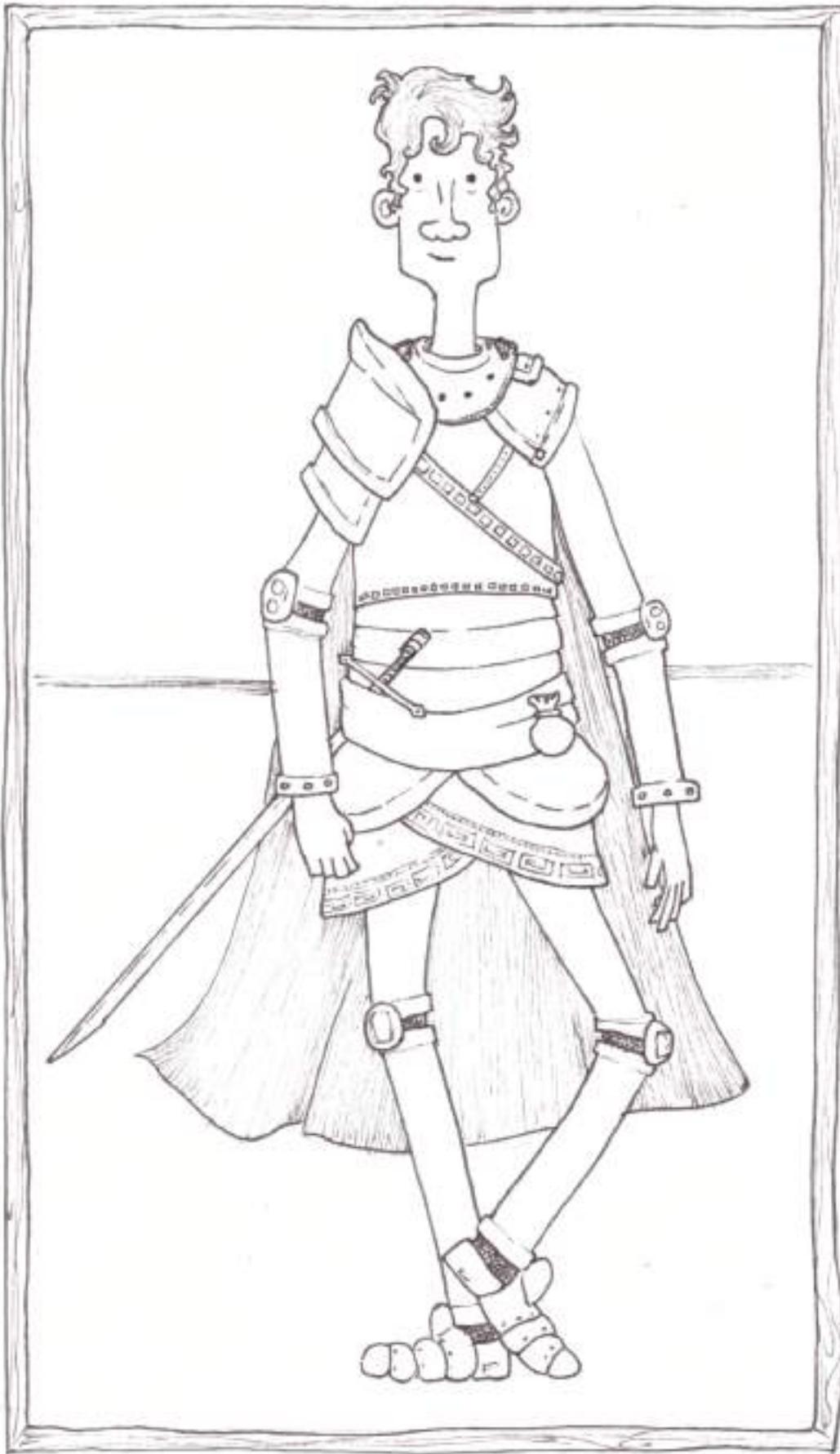
Every kingdom needs these knights, integral to any war effort and daily castle maintenance. The 'Fodder' are the expendables, the minion knights who have stumbled into knightliness though various means. Family connections are most common, as well as excessive monetary donations to the kingdom. Some of them gained their title though accidental acts of heroism. Take Sir Fent, he tripped on an untied shoelace and knocked a guard off the castle battlements. It turned out the guard was waiting for some barbarians who had paid him off so they could scale the walls unnoticed. He was praised for his cunning and knighted. Their main job is to act as a human shield protecting the kingdom with their sheer mass in numbers. That, and to protect the category 4s.





Category 4:

Speak of the devil. The category 4s are the worst of the worst. Forget avoiding them at all, because they will avoid you. They are the celebrities of the kingdom, the ones you hear stories about, and have songs written about them. I call them the 'Stars' not just because they shine so brightly, but because you can only ever dream about walking alongside one.



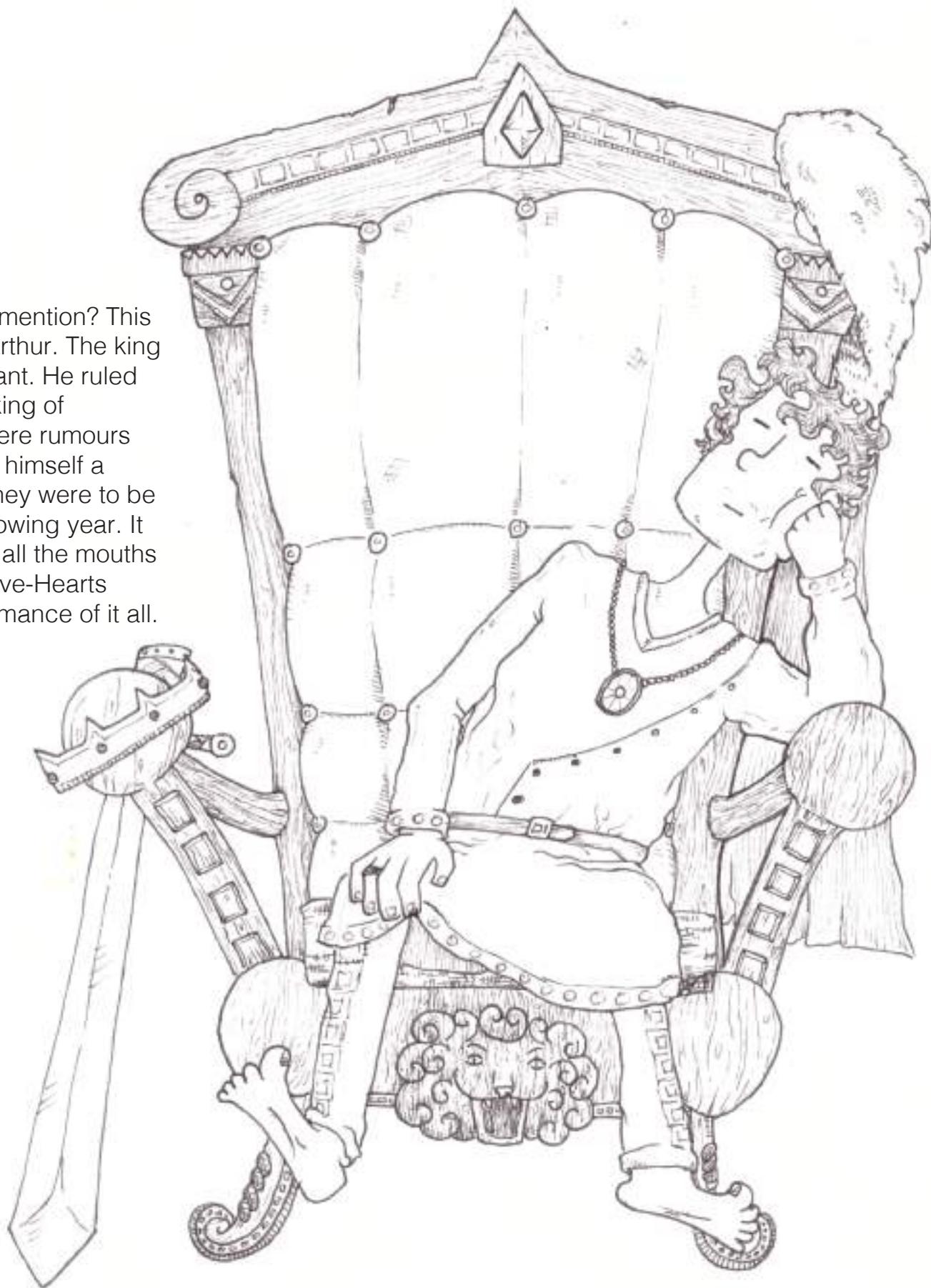
These are the categories most knights fall into in one way or another. The hero of our story however didn't fit into any of them.

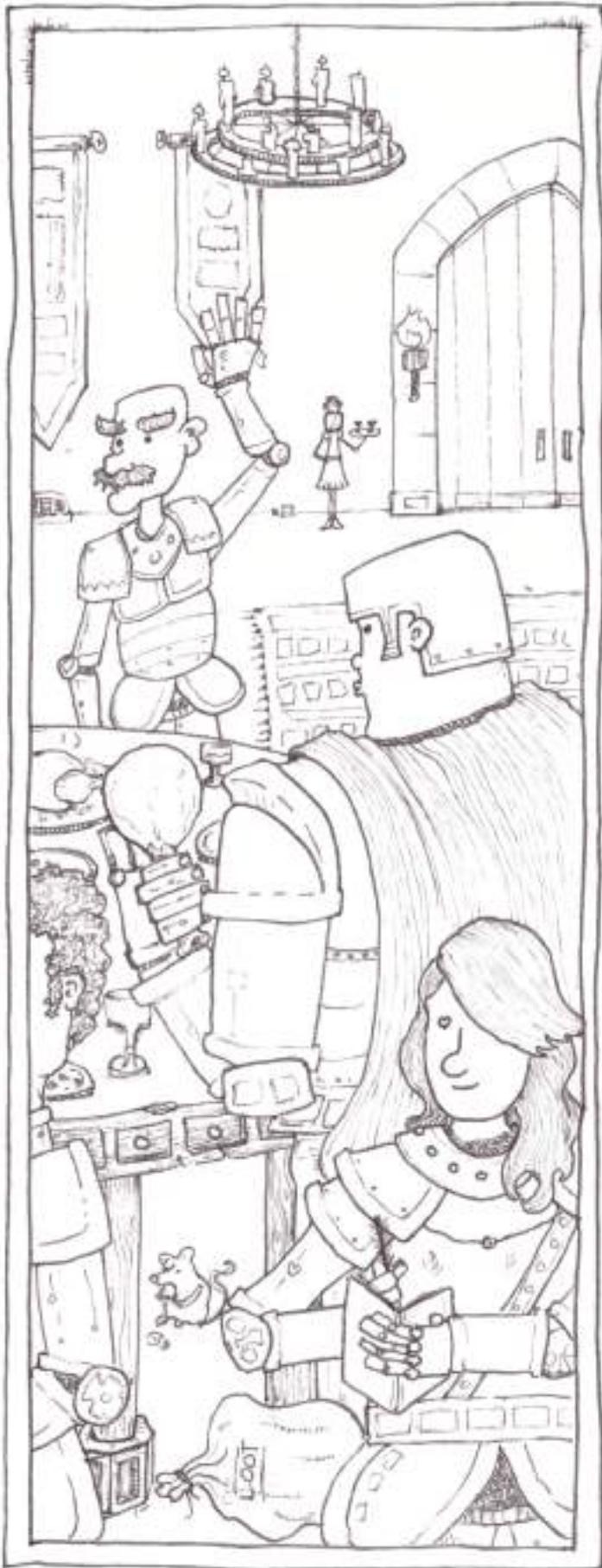
This is Sir Launfal. He is a bit of a nobody.

He wasn't strong or scary enough to be a Cod-Brained, not that he would have wanted to be. He could be a romantic every now and then, dreaming about settling down with a rescued damsel or princess, but didn't obsess over the dream like the Sleeve-Hearts.

He could count it as a blessing that he wasn't a Fodder either, as he was the most charitable knight in all the land, giving generous amounts to the people, as well as extravagant gifts to the other knights. They liked to keep him around, meaning front line, sacrificial Fodder work was never given to him. He was a background character in Camelot, always there but never valued. King Arthur had quite forgotten about him.

Oh did I forget to mention? This is Arthur... King Arthur. The king bit is quite important. He ruled over Camelot as king of England. There were rumours that he had found himself a queen, and that they were to be married in the following year. It was the gossip in all the mouths at the castle, Sleeve-Hearts pining over the romance of it all.





In fact there was to be a round table gathering to celebrate the newly engaged.

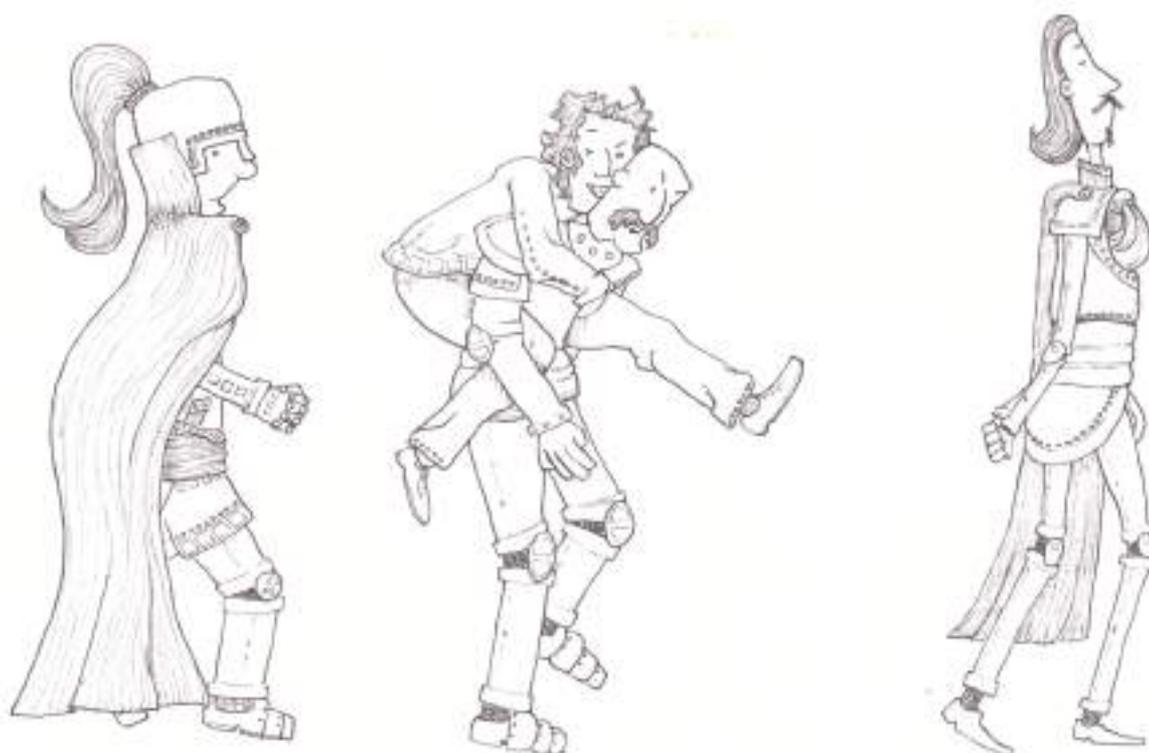
Now, the round table is a thing shrouded in myth and legend. The consensus is that it is the fabled meeting ground of king Arthur and his knights to discuss matters of the court, and this is mainly what it's used for. What a lot of people don't know is that it is also a place of great feasting and celebration, where the knights and royalty come together to feast as one. It may not come as a surprise that the latter was the more common occurrence.

Every knight was personally invited by the King and Queen to join the festivities. It was a great moment where the stars were to mingle with the other categories, and everyone was excited. The Fodder arrived first, eager to make an impression, shortly followed by the Sleeve-Hearts. The Cod-Brained were late, getting lost along the way.

Everyone went silent when the doors flung open, and in walked a parade of knights.



There was Sir Perceval, Sir Gawain, Sir Kay, Sir Yvain, Sir Gaheris, Sir Agravaine, and of course, Sir Lancelot.



Just behind them, in all their splendour, entered King Arthur and Lady Guinevere.

But where was Sir Launfal? While all this was going on he was fast asleep in his bed. Nobody had remembered to invite him. He had been dreaming about saving towns from dragons, and riding off into the sunset with a woman on the back of his horse. He woke up smiling, but it quickly left his face when he heard about the night he had missed.



'I heard that after all the formalities the night really kicked off!'

'They got though the entire supply of mead!'

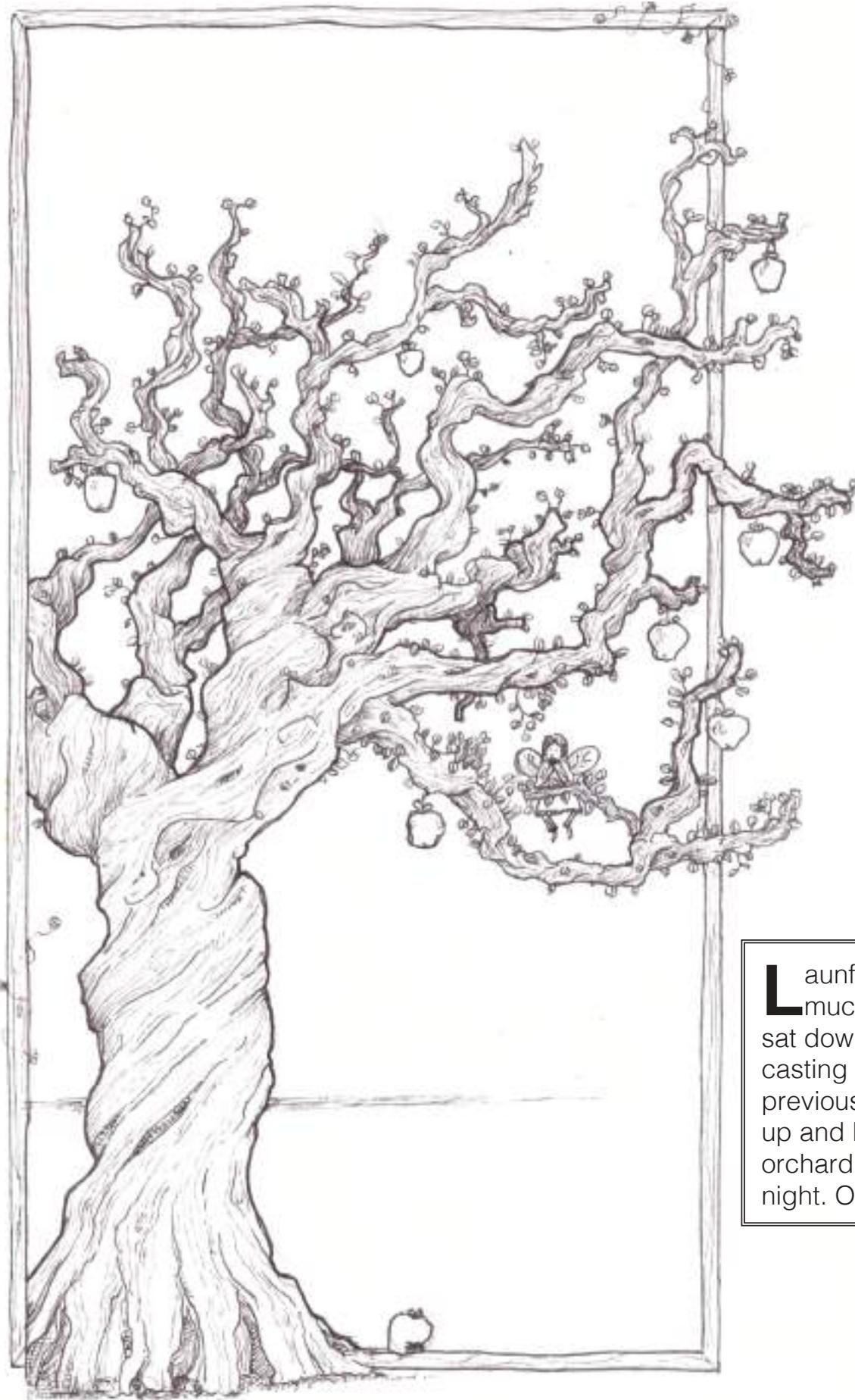
'Tell me again, Sir Lancelot did *what* on the round table?'

Launfal was understandably upset.

He decided to take a walk, wanting desperately to get away from all the chatter in the castle. He didn't want to hear about the night's revelry, or what fights had apparently broken out, or how everyone had so much fun without him being there. So he left, and rode towards a nearby apple orchard. On his way he made sure to hand out donations to everyone who passed. Giving to those in need always made him happy.

* * *





Launfal must have dozed off. It was much later than it was when he had sat down, much darker too. The sun was casting a blood red hue on the previously perfect white clouds. He sat up and looked around the apple orchard, remembering the events of last night. Or rather, the lack of events.

'Are you cryin'?' a voice squeaked from somewhere about him. Launfal shot up, trying to grab his sword but grasping his belt instead.

'Very fierce' mocked the voice, giggling. It was then that Launfal noticed the face peaking out from the branches above him. It was the face of a little girl. As she emerged he noticed this wasn't a child, but literally a 'little girl', about 30cm from curled shoes to flowery tiara.

'It's you're lucky day, my lady, dame Tryamour, wants a chat' and with that she fluttered down, revealing her honest-to-god wings. She was a fairy.

Not knowing exactly what to do, Sir Launfal just nodded with his mouth wide open, and followed as the fairy glided down towards the forest's edge. *I must be dreaming*, he thought, *either that or I've gone mad*. It had been a very strange day. *If I'm mad then what more can they do to me, and if I'm dreaming then hopefully I'll wake up*. It all seemed very real however as he entered the cool forest. A shiver ran up his spine.



'So, where exactly are we...' he started but was cut off as they turned round a tree and there she was, the most beautiful woman Sir Launfal had ever seen.

'Launfal my dear, take a seat. My name is Dame Tryamour, but you can call me Tee'.

* * *



So what is to happen to Sir Launfal? Will he be captured? Tortured? Will Lady Tryamour threaten him to give up all his knightly secrets?

No. No, he'll just fall in love.

From the moment he saw her he knew it. At first he was scared he was becoming a Sleeve-Heart, but there was something pure about what he was feeling. There was no over saturation of his love, or overly dramatic declarations of his affection. No, he just had the overwhelming desire never to be parted from her.

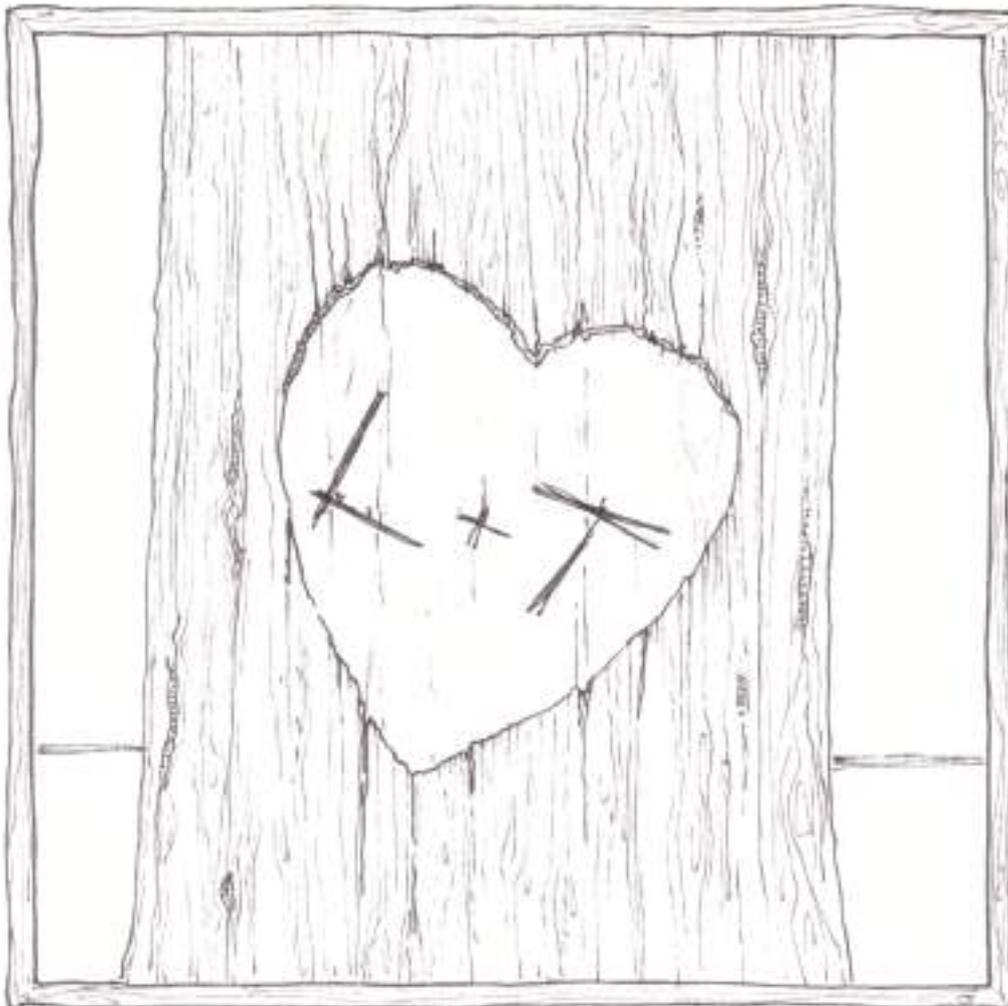
'My lady' he said, finally finding his voice after what seemed like hours.

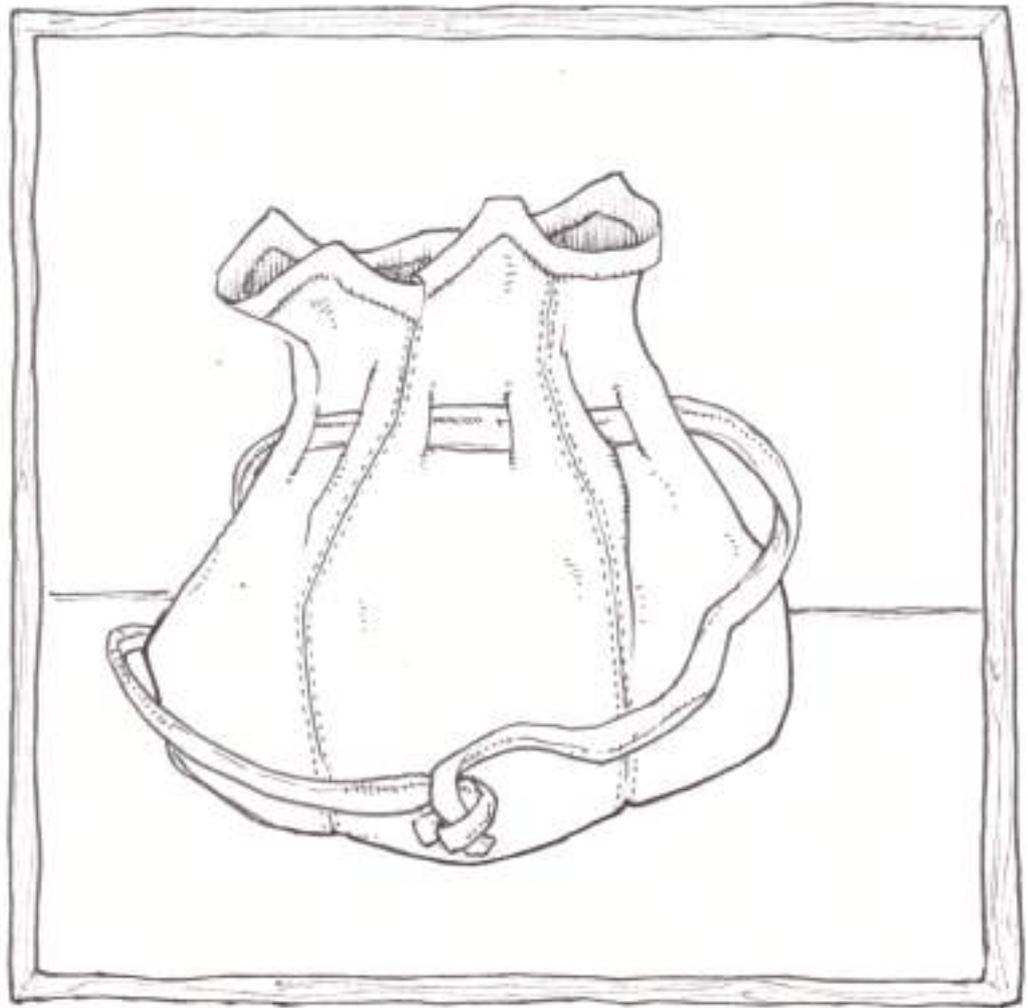
'Please, call me Tee'

'Oh, yes, Lady Tee' He gulped loudly, 'You wanted to erm, chat?' He could feel the heat rising in his face. Soon he would be as red as a tomato.

'Yes, I just wanted to thank you. Never have I seen such charity in a knight before' She gestured to the dozens of fairies that were scattered around in the trees. Launfal hadn't noticed them until now. 'And even before all of that we had heard tales of your kindness'

Tales of my kindness? Launfal was amazed. She acts like I'm a Star.





'I wanted to reward you kind knight' Lady Tee continued 'I have a gift for you'

Launfal didn't really know what to do. He sat there in awkward silence as two fairies approached him.

'Here is a purse made of silk and gold. For one so giving as you it seems correct to have a purse on you at all times. When you put your hand inside you will always find gold, wherever you are'.

He was supposed to leave at this point, grateful and happy. But he didn't want to, he wanted to know more about Lady Tee. She could sense this and asked if he would like to stay for a while, which of course he eagerly accepted.

'Promise me though' She said with a serious tone in her voice. 'You must tell nobody of me, or this place. If you do then you will never be able to find me again'. Sir Launfal agreed and they chatted until the sun set and the night passed.

He returned every day for a year.

* * *



Knights can come in many different shapes and sizes, but did you also know that queens can as well? They're much more complicated, although you can easily boil them down into two different categories.

Good queens, and bad queens.

And Guinevere wasn't a very nice queen.

She had charmed her way into Arthur's heart, and the hearts of many of the knights through her beauty and cunning. Now, she wasn't evil, not planning to overthrow the kingdom, or murder Arthur in his sleep and take his throne. Nor was she about to secretly destroy Camelot, like some have tried before. No, she just wanted power, and to boss people about.

It had been a year since she had married, and since then she had gained quite a reputation for flirting with various knights. There was no harm in any of it, she said to herself just a bit of mindless fun. This mindless fun had got her on very favourable terms with the majority of the knights, all except Sir Launfal.

He puzzled her. In the past year he had gone from a nobody she barely knew existed to an intriguing mystery. Normally wherever she went the gaze of the knights would be on her, she was loved by all. Launfal however never looked at her with any form of affection, often hardly acknowledging her presence. He would sneak off when he thought nobody was looking, and run off to the apple orchard every night. She had often thought about following him, even sending several Cod-Brained after him, though they all came back claiming they had lost him somewhere in the forest.

This will not do, she thought, deciding to find out exactly what Sir Launfal was hiding.

* * *



The Queen was furious.
'Where is Sir Launfal? I ordered every knight to come'. They were holding a jousting tournament to celebrate the royal anniversary. Each knight was expected to bring a gift. Not only did sir Launfal not bring one, but he also didn't bring himself, being lost in Lady Tee's voice as she talked about her homeland.

When he returned he went straight to his chambers, ready for a long night of rest. He was excited to see his lady the next day, having grown close to her over the last year. Still smiling he walked into his room, but there was someone already waiting for him.

'Do you not like me?' The Queen spat at him.

'Is there something wrong with me, or are you just not interested in the affections of a lady'. Launfal was horrified. The Queen of England was standing alone in his bedchambers, accusing him of... what exactly?

'It's not, I mean, you're my queen, I can't... 'Launfal started but was interrupted, 'And where were you, where do you keep going? What was so important you had to miss the tournament?'

'I was, I went to talk with a friend, that's all'.
She laughed, walking towards him.

'You don't have any friends, I've seen you, always alone'.



'That's not' she was really close now 'that's not true'.

'Come on 'brave' knight, 'kind' knight, 'generous' knight. You're not a fighter, a lover, a warrior, you're not a lot are you Launfal?' She jabbed him in the shoulder with a bony finger. It was all getting too much for Sir Launfal. He tried to slip away but she had him pinned in the corner. He couldn't push her away; she was the Queen after all.

'You don't have any friends'

He couldn't stand it any longer; he just wanted her to go.

'I do' he spluttered, 'I do. Lady Tee, Dame Tryamour, she listens to me, she always wants to hear about me and I about her' his words grew in confidence 'She is a more beautiful woman than you could ever imagine, even her ugliest maid is better looking than you!'

He really shouldn't have said that. The queen froze, and Launfal thought she would hit him. She just glared at him, then span out of the room.

Whoops, Launfal had really done it now.

He frantically put his hand to where his silk and golden purse had been. Just as he feared, it was gone. He had broken his promise, and was completely alone. Alone and in trouble with a very angry queen.

* * *





Arthur soon found out and summoned Launfal. He accused him of treason, of lying, and of being a very bad knight. Knights were supposed to uphold order in the court, not disrupt it. He was to be banished, unless he could prove that what he had said was true.

‘You must not only show us this so called ‘Fairy Queen’, but also her, what was it’ The king turned to Guinevere ‘Ah yes, you must show us her ugliest maid, and compare her beauty to...’ he sighed, and turned to his queen ‘dear, this all seems very trivial. Can we not just forget this whole matter?’ Of course she wouldn’t let Launfal get away with what he had said, and the decision was made that he would be banished.

What have I done? I should never have mentioned her, Launfal sulked. Although Launfal had no real fondness associated with Camelot itself he was reluctant to leave, not wanting to be alone, and stripped of his knighthood.

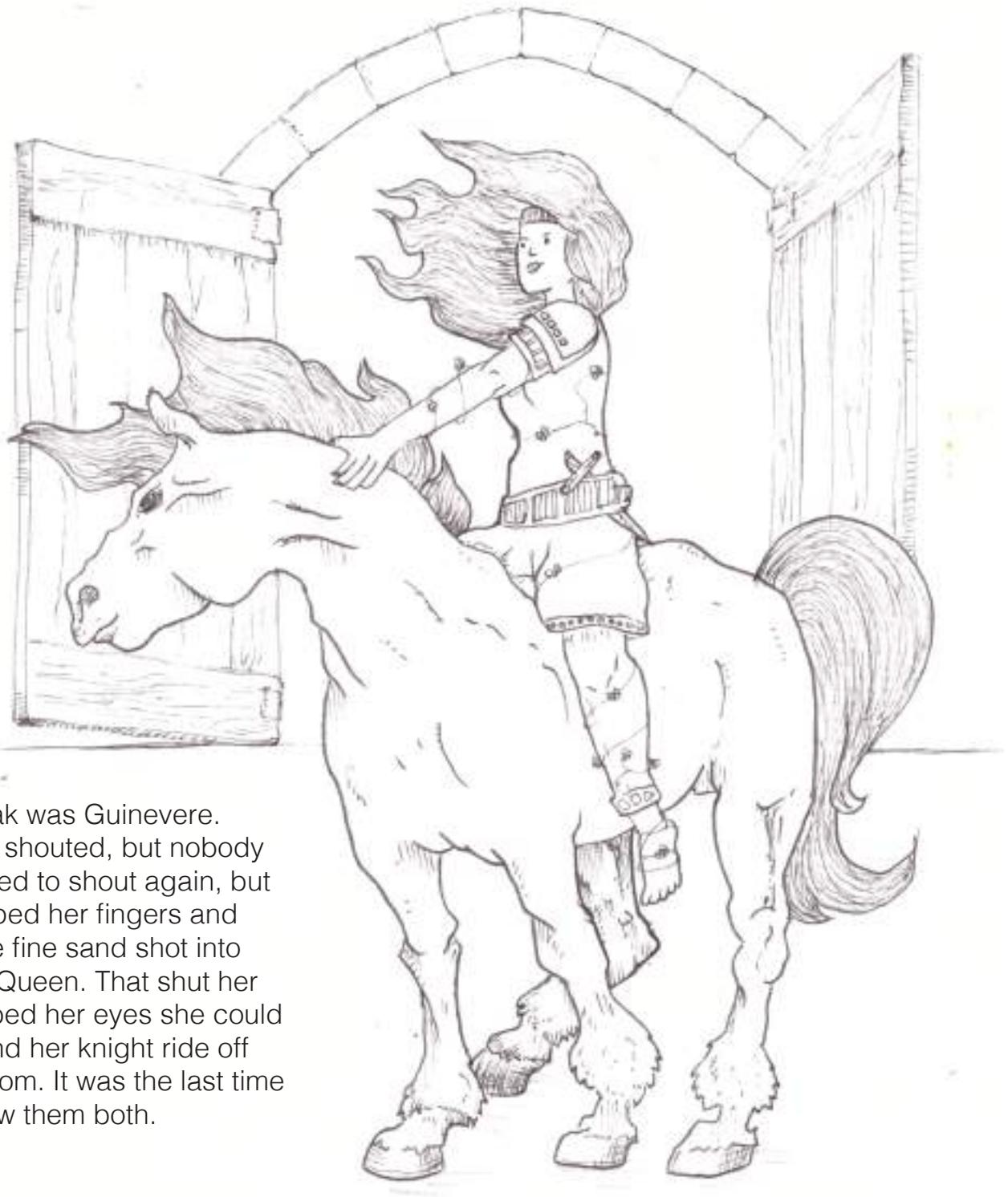
The Queen was beaming from ear to ear, very happy to have the only knight not to follow her orders exiled.

‘Where is you’re so called friend then Launfal?’ She mocked, ‘You’re a liar, you’re a...’

She was cut off by an almighty crash.

And there she was, lady Tee.

Without a word Launfal ran to her. She beckoned him to get on the back of her horse and they began to make their way out of the hall. Nobody said anything, everyone was in a mixture of shock and awe at the beauty of the Lady. Launfal was overjoyed; she had forgiven him, and rescued him.



The first to speak was Guinevere. 'Stop them' she shouted, but nobody listened. She tried to shout again, but Lady Tee snapped her fingers and what looked like fine sand shot into the eyes of the Queen. That shut her up. As she rubbed her eyes she could see the Lady and her knight ride off out of the kingdom. It was the last time anyone ever saw them both.

L aunfal wasn't a Cod-Brained, or a Sleeve-Heart.
He wasn't a Fodder and he wasn't a Star. If
anything he was a category 5: The Happily Ever
After.

