

THE QUEST FOR THE HOELY PAEL

A Short Comedy

by **Michael Forbes**

SchoolPlay Productions Ltd

THE QUEST FOR THE HOELY PAEL

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THE QUEST FOR THE HOELY PAEL

An heroic tale set in Arthurian Britain

by Michael Forbes

SCENES:

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Scene 1</i> | Outside the Palace of Camelot |
| <i>Scene 2</i> | At Camelot |
| <i>Scene 3</i> | The Boyles' Home |
| <i>Scene 4</i> | The Troll's Bridge |
| <i>Scene 5</i> | The Giant's Forest |
| <i>Scene 6</i> | The Dragon's Mountain |
| <i>Scene 7</i> | The Castle of the Hoely Pael |
| <i>Scene 8</i> | The Return to Camelot |
| <i>Scene 9</i> | At Camelot |

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

LANCING BOYLE
MISTRESS BOYLE

*The Hero. Young, brave but not ambitious.
Lancing's mother. Over-anxious to see her son
make a name for himself.*

KING ARTHUR
QUEEN GUINEVERE
MERLIN
STEWARD

*King of Britain.
Queen of Britain.
Arthur's wizard.
He has the duty of keeping His Majesty's affairs
in order. A fussy fellow.*

QUEST-MASTER

*He has the duty of thinking up new quests for
knights to undertake. A quarrelsome chap.*

SERGEANT-at-ARMS
TWO SOLDIERS

He does any loud reading necessary.

SIR WILLIAM }
SIR MICHAEL }
SIR PETER }

Suitors. Rich, courteous types.

TROLL

*Lives under a bridge and eats most of the people
who cross it.*

GIANT FORESTER

*Lives in his forest and occasionally poisons
visitors by offering them a drink.*

DRAGON

*Lives inside a mountain. Used to be very fierce
and a bit longer.*

THREE-in-ONE
PRINCESS MILDRED

*A three-headed monster which argues with itself
The heroine. Very fair, very beautiful and pretty
heavy.*

NARRATORS

Two needed. More if desired.

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SCENE 1. *Outside the Palace of Camelot*

(Enter MISTRESS BOYLE and her son, LANCING)

M. Boyle: Now listen, son. You're a good boy, you always have been. You do as you're told. You clean behind your ears. You wash your hands before dinner and the plates afterwards. I never complain about you, do I? *(pause)* Do I?

Lancing: No, mother.

M. Boyle: I'm not asking much, you know. All I want you to do is what lots of young men do - become a knight. That's all. Mistress Turner, next door, would be green with envy if you became a knight while her son's only a school-master.

Lancing: Mother, I don't want to become a knight.

M. Boyle: Of course you do. Every young man does.

Lancing: But I don't. I've told you a thousand times that my greatest desire is to become a stained-glass window maker.

M. Boyle: Stuff and nonsense! I know. You're scared.

Lancing: Scared of what?

M. Boyle: Scared of doing the bold and daring deeds knights do.

Lancing: I'll do anything bold and anything daring but not to become a knight.

M. Boyle: I'd be so proud of you. *(LANCING is unmoved)* Look, here we are at the palace. Let us at least see His Majesty. *(enter three SOLDIERS)*

Sergeant: Gua - ards! Halt! Right then, you two. I understand this is the first time you have been on gate duty. Do I understand correctly?

Soldiers: You understand correctly, sergeant.

Sergeant: Then I will inform you of your duties. Failure to carry them out properly will result in your being assigned to special fatigues, viz - polishing the Round Table. Do you understand?

Soldiers: Understood, Sergeant.

Sergeant: No-one is to be admitted to the King's presence without a pass. Passes are issued to the following categories of visitors. Viz

Soldier 1: (Bill) Viz?

Soldier 2: (Harry) Viz!

Sergeant: Viz 1) Damsels in Distress.

Viz 2) Applicants for the knighthood.

Viz 3) Unicorns.

Viz 4) Sundry Others.

Soldier 1: What's a sundry other?

Sergeant: Is that understood?

Soldier 2: Understood, sergeant. (*exit SERGEANT*)

Soldier 1: Where do they get their passes from, Harold?

Soldier 2: The Steward.

Soldier 1: How do they get to see the Steward?

Soldier 2: They have to pass through us.

Soldier 1: But, Harold, the sergeant said we mustn't let anyone through without a pass.

Soldier 2: Yes, that's what he said, Bill.

Soldier 1: Then I don't understand how anyone gets to see the King.

Soldier 2: To understand how anyone gets to see the King you need to understand something else.

Soldier 1: What's that, Harold?

Soldier 2: The sergeant is a twerp. Understand?

Soldier 1: Understood! (*M. BOYLE and LANCING approach the SOLDIERS*)

M. Boyle: I'm Mistress Boyle and this is my son, Lancing. (*pause*)

Soldier 2: Delighted to make your acquaintance, Madam. This is the Right Honourable Soldier Bill, whilst I am Archer Harold. (roughly) Now what do you want?

M. Boyle: We've come to see the King.

Soldier 1: Why?

M. Boyle: My son wants to become a knight.

Soldier 2: He's the second one this week.

Soldier 1: What's happening to the first one?

Soldier 2: King Arthur has sent him on the usual impossible quest. He has to collect overdue taxes from the Scottish merchants. We'll never see 'im again.

Soldier 1: Candidates for the knight-hood proceed down the main corridor, they turn left at its end, they go right round the bend and then they await the summons of the Steward.

M. Boyle: We are most grateful.

Soldiers: Don't mention it.

(*Exeunt*)

SCENE 2. *The Palace of Camelot.*

(*On stage KING ARTHUR, MERLIN, STEWARD, SIR WILLIAM, MICHAEL and PETER, also GUARDS etc.*)

King Arthur: Merlin, you've failed again.

Merlin: Oh dear, have I, Your Majesty?

King Arthur: Yes. You promised me that the spell you put on the Queen's bedtime drink would give her such a bad night's sleep that she would need to stay in bed all morning to recover, thereby giving me a chance to slip away to the grand hunt in Sir Brian's forest.

Merlin: Didn't the spell work then?

King Arthur: No, Merlin, it didn't. She woke at five o'clock, saying what a wonderful night's sleep she'd had. She then started to sing. Have you heard the Queen sing, Merlin?

Merlin: No, Your Majesty.

King Arthur: You will, Merlin, you will. First she sang, then she ran round the room doing her physical exercises. When I was completely exhausted by this she proceeded to lecture me for an hour about the evils of hunting.

Merlin: I am sure Your Majesty was able to persuade her she was wrong.

King Arthur: Ummm. I am the greatest huntsman in the Kingdom, am I not, gentlemen?

Gentlemen: Yes, Your Majesty.

King Arthur: And I am a very clever and persuasive speaker, am I not?

Gentlemen: Yes, Your Majesty.

King Arthur: After all, did I not persuade you violent lot to sit down together at the Round Table and talk without stabbing each other? So, when the Queen told me that hunting was evil and that I should never go hunting again, do you think I was able to persuade her that she was wrong? (*pause*) Of course I wasn't!

Steward: The Queen is approaching the Castle, Your Majesty.

King Arthur: (*looking out of the window*) Oh yes, there she is. Look, Merlin, how she runs up the hill.

Merlin: Dragging that poor horse behind her. She's knocked one of the guards into the moat! (*Sound of running feet - enter QUEEN GUINEVERE*)

Queen Guinevere: Good day to all of you! What a wonderful day! It's splendid to be alive!

King Arthur: I'm not sure that guard would agree with you.

Queen Guinevere: What did you say, Arthur?

King Arthur: I'm sure it's not hard to agree with you, Guinevere dear.

Queen Guinevere: Good morning, Sir William. How are you getting on with that

diet I wrote out for you? Not very well I think.

Sir William: I'm following it as closely as I can, Your Majesty.

Sir Michael: Rubbish, Sir William! How can you be following it? You can't read.

Queen Guinevere: And you, Sir Michael. I am glad you are taking the daily bath I recommended. I have seen your servants carrying the water up to your chamber.

Sir Michael: Yes, Your Majesty. I make my servants prepare a bath every day.

Sir Peter: But who takes the bath, Sir Michael? Who takes it? (*sniffs SIR MICHAEL*) Not you, I think.

Sir Michael: Silence, Sir Peter!

Queen Guinevere: And you, Sir Peter. You said you wished to accompany me on my early morning runs. But I run alone.

Sir Peter: No, Your Majesty. You said you wished me to accompany you on your early morning runs.

Queen Guinevere: Is not my wish your command?

Sir Peter: Of course. I will obey and run with you, if His Majesty allows, (*KING ARTHUR signals agreement*) just as soon as I have recovered from the wound I suffered in my leg fighting for your honour at the tournament.

Sir William: Stuff and nonsense! You twisted your ankle when the landlord of the "Sword in the Stone" threw you out roaring drunk three weeks ago! (*They fight*)

King Arthur: Pax, gentlemen! By order of the King! (*Enter M. BOYLE and LANCING*)

M. Boyle: Are you the steward?

Steward: Are you addressing me, woman?

M. Boyle: Are you the steward?

Steward: Yes.

M. Boyle: My son wants to become a knight.

Steward: Why?

M. Boyle: (*momentarily at a loss*) Oh, well, er. . . .

Lancing: Well, actually I don't want to. . . .

M. Boyle: (*interrupting*) He doesn't want to boast but he thinks he would make a very good knight.

Steward: Wait there. (*goes to KING ARTHUR*) Your Majesty?

King Arthur: Yes, Steward.

Steward: We have here another candidate for a place at the Round Table.

King Arthur: Oh. Do we have a place?

Steward: If you remember, Sire, Sir Paddington fell off his horse yesterday fatally, so his seat is vacant. But you sent a knight candidate on a quest at the beginning of the week.

King Arthur: He may not return, nor may this one. If they both come back, they can fight for the seat at the next tournament. Let me look at the fellow. Sirrah! Come here!

Lancing: Your Majesty.

King Arthur: Why do you wish to become a knight?

Lancing: Er

M. Boyle: (*interrupting*) To right wrongs, help the weak, punish the wicked and to rescue damsels in distress.

King Arthur: Oh yes, the usual reasons. To qualify for a knighthood you must undertake a quest. Merlin, tell them what a quest is.

Merlin: A quest is a journey, long, arduous, difficult. On such a journey you suffer great hardship and pain and for many the journey is a final one. You have to complete impossible tasks within a given time. Steward, summon the Quest-Master. (*to LANCING*) What is your name?

Lancing: Lancing, Sir.

Queen Guinevere: Lancelot? Did you say, 'Lancelot'? Are you really Lancelot come back to me? Let me look at you. Ah, you are like him. You bring back memories of him. Oh, Lancelot, so noble of face

King Arthur: Prancing around all over the place.

Queen Guinevere: So strong and so stern on your splendid white steed.

King Arthur: An obnoxious ninny we didn't need.

Queen Guinevere: So brave in battle, bashing the foe.

King Arthur: An unwelcome guest who just wouldn't go.

Queen Guinevere: Oh, Lancelot, I remember your touch.

Oh, Lancelot, I miss you so much.

Thinking of Lancelot has made me sad. I feel the need to sing. (*to LANCING*) Will you come and sing with me? I shall sing from the top of the North Tower.

Lancing: Erer

King Arthur: No, Guinevere. The boy wants to embark on a dangerous quest but not as dangerous as that. I know who will sing with you. (*MERLIN begins to sidle off stage*) Merlin! Accompany Her Majesty to the North Tower both in person and in song! (*Exeunt MERLIN and QUEEN GUINEVERE - enter QUEST-MASTER*)

King Arthur: Quest-Master, have we a suitable quest for this fine young fellow?

Quest-Master: Perhaps, Sire. I am beginning to run out of quests because you are sending so many young fellows out on them. It was all right in the old days. Most knights then were stupid and failed in their quests and so we could use the same one over and over again. Nowadays they usually succeed. I blame the schools, you know. They teach too much.

King Arthur: Stop fussing, Quest-Master.

Quest-Master: Yes, Your Majesty. Now let me see what I've got here. He could slay the dreadful monster crocodile-eater.

King Arthur: That sounds good. What do you think, fellow? Would you like to kill an enormous crocodile?

Quest-Master: No, Sire, the monster is a crocodile eater. It eats crocodiles, crocodiles of children walking hand in hand and two by two, with their teacher at the head. The monster creeps along the ground and starts munching from the rear and chews his way along the line of dear little children and then he opens his jaws really wide for the larger morsel of the teacher at the end.

King Arthur: Quest-Master! That's another of your jokes!

Quest-Master: Sorry, Sire. I crave pardon.

King Arthur: Come, let us have a real quest.

Quest-Master: Very good. Where e'er my hand comes to rest that shall be the chosen quest. (*plucks out a quest from his quest bag*)

King Arthur: Sergeant.

Sergeant: Hear ye, hear ye of the quest chosen. It is the quest for the Hoely Pael. The Knight-candidate must cross the impassable river, he must travel through the impenetrable forest, he must climb the insurmountable mountain. Then he must find the Hoely Pael and return with the Hoely Pael to Camelot on the twenty-first day hereafter at the ninth hour.

King Arthur: It seems a good quest. So there you have it, whatever your name is. We look forward to seeing the Hoely Pael in three weeks time. (*as he leaves with STEWARD*) What on earth is the Hoely Pael? Do you know?

Steward: A leaky bucket perhaps?

SCENE 3. The Boyles' home.

(M. BOYLE and LANCING on stage)

M. Boyle: There, your bag is packed. I've put in a spare woolly vest and some herb preparations to keep you regular and enough food for a week. You can't carry any more. Good luck, my boy. Say good-bye and give me a kiss.

Lancing: Mother, I am going on a quest I know not where, to search for I know not what, but which I am sure I do not want. This I do for you, Mother dear, not me. (*he kisses his mother.*) Farewell. (*Exeunt M. BOYLE and LANCING.*)

SCENE 4. *The Troll's Bridge*

(enter NARRATORS and LANCING)

Narrator 1: Was Lancing to travel North, South, East or West? How could he know since he was given neither map nor directions? He guessed that the impassable river would be the first obstacle to cross and yet he had never heard of such a river. So he simply started walking into unknown country. After many riverless miles and four days of journeying he did come to a river. Impassable? It ran deep, swift and wide. But there was a bridge.

Lancing: This cannot be the impassable river since yonder bridge looks stout and strong. *(begins to walk across bridge. TROLL appears, lunges at LANCING who retreats off bridge hurriedly)*

Troll: Who dares pass across my bridge?

Lancing: Just a poor traveller who does not know his way.

Troll: You lie, Sirrah. You are one of those knaves bent on causing trouble to us poor trolls.

Lancing: Not I, Sir.

Troll: Huh! Well this river is impassable. I have long claws, sharp teeth and a hungry stomach. This fair-looking stream flows swifter than an arrow in flight in a channel whose depth is measured in sea fathoms. Swim it, if you dare. *(pause)* There is a way, though, to cross my bridge. I eat most that attempt the crossing but not all, not all. I have no stomach for some. *(LANCING goes to sit down)*

Narrator 2: Lancing had not wanted to start this quest and he certainly had no wish to risk his life continuing it. But could he return to face the sneers of the court and, worse than that, the contempt of his mother? He could, he supposed, neither cross the bridge nor return to Camelot but run away to some other land. However, Lancing was no coward. How, then, was he to cross the bridge? Whom did the Troll allow to pass?

Lancing: "I have no stomach for some." But for whom?

Narrator 1: Lancing was a patient man. The sun set and rose again as he sat thinking. *(lights dim and rise)*

Lancing: "I have no stomach for some." *(pause)* . . . for those with stomach, for those with courage! If I show courage he won't eat me. He will let me pass. Or will he? In case I am wrong I shall leave this inscribed penknife of mine here. Someone may find it and bring it home to my grieving mother. *(LANCING draws sword and advances across the bridge courageously. TROLL seizes sword in bare hands and throws it into the river. TROLL threatens to throttle LANCING but stops)*

Troll: Pass on, my courageous friend.

Lancing: Thank you, Sir Troll. Please accept the penknife as payment for crossing your bridge.

Troll: May your generosity be rewarded. (*LANCING wanders off, uncertain as to which direction to take*). Good Sir, that way is your way. (*Exit LANCING in that direction*).

SCENE 5. *The Giant's Forest*

(*enter LANCING front of curtain*)

Narrator 2: Five more days of weary travelling passed. His mother's provisions had long run out and only wild fruits prevented total starvation. So it was that dazed with hunger he came to the impenetrable forest. But what is an impenetrable forest but a forest you cannot pass through?

Lancing: I cannot pass through this forest. (*LANCING seems to strain at curtain*)

Narrator 1: He walked or rather staggered up and down its edge for half a day looking for an entrance, but the trees grew so close together that a ghost would have had difficulty going between them. But then . . . (*Curtains open a little to reveal table, notice, food*)

Lancing: What is this?

Narrator 2: A gap in the trees, not previously seen, revealed itself. And at one side of the gap Lancing saw a table laden with food. (*as NARRATOR speaks LANCING performs actions accordingly*) Above the table was a large notice. "Feed not on what is mine, lest death be thine, signed Giant Forester". Starving men don't read notices and Lancing had wolfed down a fair portion of the food before he read the sign. Since he could do nothing to put right the theft, he merely shrugged his shoulders and, hoping to escape the giant's notice, he strode into the forest. (*Curtains open fully. LANCING bumps into two legs which turn out to belong to Giant Forester*)

Giant Forester: Well, hello, little man! What brings you to my leafy dwelling?

Lancing: I'm on a quest, your Highness.

Giant Forester: Ha, ha! Your Highness! I like that! For what are you questing?

Lancing: The Hoely Pael.

Giant Forester: A fine quest that one.

Lancing: Oh, do you know about it then?

Giant Forester: Of course. And I may tell you about it since you look an honest fellow. I expect you are hungry after walking the long road to my trees.

Lancing: Oh, no. I'm not. . . er . . . because my mother packed me a very large

picnic.

Giant Forester: Which has lasted ten days?

Lancing: Er, yes.

Giant Forester: And you have eaten nothing except your mother's food?

Lancing: No, Sir, apart from a few berries.

Giant Forester: Come, then, and have a drink with me. (*gives LANCING a drink. LANCING chokes and goes into a fit*) Oh, my poor dear chap. I should not have given you that for it is giants' whiskey, which is lethal to humans. You have not long to live, I fear. Please forgive me.

Lancing: I forgive you. This must be my punishment for dishonesty.

Giant Forester: What?

Lancing: I lied to you. I have eaten something other than my mother's food. I ate much of your food at the forest gate. Will you forgive me before I die?

Giant Forester: Ha! Drink this! (*throws LANCING another bottle. LANCING drinks and recovers*) You pass, small fellow, only just, but you pass. I knew you ate my food. I allow anyone through my forest, thieves, layabouts, ruffians, drunkards but not liars. No, not liars. These have their bones picked clean by the birds when they lie dead, drunk from giants' whiskey. On your way, man. Go Northeast for as many leagues as you have fingers and toes.

Lancing: Is that the right way to go?

Giant Forester: Would I lie to you? Ha! Take some more of my food with you.

Lancing: Please have this kerchief of mine.

Giant Forester: Thank you. It will serve well as a handkerchief. I shall remember your kindness.

SCENE 6. *The Dragon's Mountain*

(*Enter LANCING front of Curtain - Curtain open slightly at centre*)

Narrator 1: Nineteen leagues and two long days later Lancing found himself at the foot of a very clearly insurmountable mountain.

Narrator 2: Not only did the giant know where Lancing wanted to go but he also knew that Lancing had only nine toes, having lost one during infancy. (*LANCING sits disconsolately by a sheer mountain wall, i.e. the Curtain. He hears a rumble from inside the mountain*)

Lancing: That noise is coming from inside the mountain. Yes, just here. A cave. (*Enters cave, i.e. goes behind Curtain. Rock doors close behind him*) Mercy! Locked in! Courage now. The way must be forward. Good Lord, a

dragon! (*Curtains open fully*)

Dragon: Oh! A human! You startled me. You are a human, aren't you? I haven't eaten, I mean seen one for ages. Yes, you are human and yes, there is no way out. You have to get past me and I have to breathe fire all over you and eat you. I don't like doing it. I much prefer the taste of mice and bats. But rules are rules. Dragons roast people and eat them. I'm a dragon and so I'm going to eat you. I'm afraid courage won't help you. I know courage got you past friend Troll. How is he, by the way? I haven't seen him for decades. But at his bridge you had a choice. You could have run away. Courage is going on when you can go back, is it not? Here you can't go back, so you can't be called courageous going on, can you?

Lancing: I suppose not. (*LANCING walks round DRAGON*)

Dragon: Now, stand still, please. My aim is not very good and I don't want to cause you unnecessary pain by burning bits off you. I'm sure you'd much rather go up in a blinding fiery puff.

Lancing: May I make an observation before you ignite me?

Dragon: Go ahead.

Lancing: You have a very short tail.

Dragon: Er yes an unfortunate encounter with the brother of Sir George, the Dragon-Slayer. His bones are over there in the corner.

Narrator 9: Lancing's mother had told him many things as a child and still did. He paid little attention now, but, when a boy, he had listened most carefully, and he remembered her saying something about dragons' tails and how that was where they made their fire and, though a dragon could live without a tail, he could no longer light a fire just by saying 'Hello.'

Lancing: So all this talk about blinding, fiery puffs is nonsense. Yes?

Dragon: Yes. But I've still got my claws. (*points very blunt claws*) Oh, I forgot. I cut them last century because I kept stabbing myself.

Lancing: No fire, no claws. I hardly need courage to get past you.

Dragon: No, but you need something else!

Lancing: (*ignoring this*) All I have to do is to finish off the job begun by Sir George's brother (*LANCING advances on DRAGON, weapon drawn*)

Dragon: Go ahead, then. I expect it's time I left this world after all these millenia. Farewell, mountain.

Lancing: (*Throws down weapon*) No. I shan't kill you. If it is part of my quest to slay defenceless dragons, I quit now. I shall be grateful if you will show me a way home.

Dragon: Not home, but onward! You have passed the test of kindness. I shall move aside for you so that you may gain a passage which will take you up, over and down the mountain. Thence go north until you see what you are

seeking. I said you needed something else other than courage to pass me. It was kindness. Had you killed me, your quest and your life would have ended, for my dead body, weighing ten tons, would have blocked the only way out. Good luck, kind Sir,

Lancing: A gift for you. (*Ties ribbon around tail end*)

Dragon: Thank you. (*Exit LANCING*)

SCENE 7. The Castle of the Hoely Pael.

(Enter LANCING)

Narrator 2: Once up, over and down the mountain, Lancing found himself trekking across a featureless plain under a dull sky. No hills or valleys spoiled the dead flatness of the terrain which was as colourless as nature could make it. The sparse grass was only just green, and the trunks and branches of the few trees were grey. Flowers were absent. You could say that the landscape was totally pale.

Narrator 1: For four days Lancing stumbled on feeding off what was left of Giant Forester's table. He began to think that he would die on that plain, since he could see for miles and there was nothing he could see miles away which was any different to what he could see in front of him. But maybe a guardian angel watches over questers, because two hours after he had eaten the last of his food there loomed up only a hundred yards distant a castle. He had not seen it before because its colour was the colour of the land and the colour of the sky. It was pale, wholly pale.

Lancing: Journey's end. I know it. This must be the Castle of the Hoely Pael. Now I must enter. There must be something inside I am meant to bring back. But where is the entrance? I see no door or window. (*enter THREE-HEADED MONSTER*)

Head 1: What an ugly fellow.

Head 2: He looks very handsome.

Head 3: I do not agree.

Head 1: What does he want?

Head 2: Why not ask him?

Head 3: I couldn't care less.

Head 1: He seeks a door.

Head 2: He seeks a window.

Head 3: He seeks an entrance.

Head 1: Shall we tell him

Head 2: How to get in?

Head 3: Yes.

Head 1: No.

Head 2: Let's ask him riddles.

Head 3: What a silly idea!

Head 1: If he solves them

Head 2: We shall help him.

Head 3: He gets them wrong

Head 1: Then we eat him.

Head 2: Let's eat him anyway.

Head 3: He wouldn't taste nice.

Head 1: Fried.

Head 2: No boiled.

Head 3: No stewed.

Head 1: No baked.

Head 2: No poached.

Head 3: No grilled.

Lancing: I don't think you know any riddles.

Head 1: Actually we do not.

Head 2: Excuse me I do.

Head 3: I know one two.

Head 1: Ask him one then.

Head 2: I have four friends who stand in a row,
 While I on my own like a drunkard lean,
 But like twigs from one branch we grow,
 And the five of us together work as a team.

Lancing: *(after some thought)* A thumb.

Head 3: Bother! He's got it. Here is another one.
 Never leaving you, not always there,
 Shifting shape constantly,
 Copying you loyally,
 Created by light, but shine a light on it and it'll soon disappear.

Lancing: *(after even more thought)* A shadow.

Head 1: Humph. No dinner today.

Head 2: Well done, Sir, congratulations.

Head 3: You've passed our test.

Lancing: Thank you, thank you.

Head 3: Excuse me, you forgot me.

Lancing: Oh, sorry. Thank you. My gift for you is a piece of advice:

Be three joined in one not one divided into three,
For one in three will never agree,
But three in one will see eye to eye,
Or should I say eyes to eyes,
And thinking together will become ever so wise,
And working together will get everything done.
Not one in three, I repeat, but three in one. (*MONSTER looks
puzzled. It lets out the HOELY PAEL*)

Hoely Pael: Oh, my Prince, you've saved me.

Lancing: Have I?

Hoely Pael: Yes, Sir. I am Princess Mildred, the Hoely Pael. My story is a sad one. When I was just a slip of a girl my mother died. My father, the King, was then bewitched by the second most beautiful woman in the kingdom and he married her. She was spiteful, mean, bad-tempered and above all jealous of me, the most beautiful woman in my father's land. She used withcraft to turn father against me and she had me accused of plotting to take his crown. I was banished here and I have been kept in this castle for ten years guarded by this three-headed thing. It is I you must take to Camelot. But we must hurry for you only have five days left before the twenty-one days for your quest are completed.

Lancing: You really are pale, aren't you?

Hoely Pael: It is the effect of living in this colourless wilderness. I'm afraid you must carry me. My step-mother placed this ball and chain around my ankle and fastened it with a spell. Merlin will break it I am sure.

Lancing: A pleasure, my lady. (*LANCING goes to pick up HOELY PAEL*)

Head 2: Princess, some food for the journey. (*LANCING collects it. Then he lifts HOELY PAEL*)

Lancing: How do you know we only have five days left? (*HOELY PAEL gives a knowing look. Exeunt.*)

SCENE 8. The return to Camelot.

Narrator 2: How did the Princess know how much time they had to get home?

Narrator 1: How did the Troll, Giant Forester and the Dragon know the way Lancing had to take?

Narrator 2: How were they going to reach Camelot in time?

Narrator 1: I can answer that question. Lancing and Princess Mildred were helped

on their way home by the un-human beings who wished to show their gratitude for the gifts. The Three-in-one, working more harmoniously than ever before, bowled them half way across the plain. The Dragon tossed them way over the mountain. Giant Forester flung them far out of his forest and Friend Troll hurled them leagues past his river. Nevertheless Lancing had to carry the fairest princess that ever lived many a long mile. (*LANCING carries HOELY PAEL across the stage three times: in his arms, 'piggy-back' and over his shoulder. Then exeunt.*)

SCENE 9. At Camelot.

(Enter KING ARTHUR, STEWARD, SUITORS, SERGEANT, SOLDIERS, MISTRESS BOYLE)

King Arthur: Well, Steward. What have I to do today? *(enter QUEEN GUINEVERE at a run)*

Queen Guinevere: You must come to the inaugural meeting of the British League against blood sports. I've just made you president of it.

Steward: Your Majesty is to attend the funeral of the knight candidate you sent to Scotland. The Scottish merchants sent back his body instead of their unpaid taxes. In the afternoon you have to judge the 'Shiniest Armour Competition'. But first, Sire, at 9 o'clock you must pronounce the failure of Knight Candidate Lancing to complete his quest on time.

King Arthur: Watchman, what is the hour now?

Watchman: Ten minutes short of nine o'clock, Sire.

King Arthur: Summon the Quest-Master. Summon Merlin. *(they enter)*

Quest-Master: Has that fellow failed to return then?

Steward: It would appear so.

Quest-Master: Hooray! *(enter LANCING carrying HOELY PAEL)*

All: Hooray!

M. Boyle: Ooh, Lancing, my lovely boy!

Queen Guinevere: Lancelot used to carry me like that sometimes.

Merlin: This is the Hoely Pael Princess, Your Majesty. I know for sure.

King Arthur: Well done, Sir. Kneel before me so that I can knight you.

Quest-Master: Er . . . just a moment, Your Majesty, I hate to spoil the celebrations but, Sergeant, you did not read the small writing at the bottom of the quest instructions. Please read it now.

Sergeant: Small writing? What small writing? Oh, that small writing. *(reads)*

Ahem. I crave pardon, Your Majesty. There is something else Knight Candidate Lancing must do to complete his quest. It says here: 'Once the Hoely Pael is brought to court she must be made to blush by him who brought her.'

Lancing: Sire, that is impossible. Five days I have travelled with her. She has puffed and panted enough to make the fittest athlete go red in the face, but she has remained as pale as you see her now.

Quest-Master: Perhaps if you slapped her gently.

Lancing: Never! I will renounce the quest rather than do that.

Hoely Pael: Oh, Lancing!

M. Boyle: He's such a nice boy and so handsome, too. He'll make someone very happy.

Queen Guinevere: Oh yes, I hope he will, I hope he will.

Merlin: Well there is another way to make a girl blush, isn't there?

King Arthur: Yes, there is.

Queen Guinevere: It's obvious, really.

All: Oh, yes.

M. Boyle: Go on, Lancing. You know what to do.

Lancing: But, mother. I can't. I shan't.

Hoely Pael: Oh, please, Lancing. I'll be yours for ever if you do.

Lancing: That's partly what I'm afraid of. Still I should not leave a task unfinished. (*kisses HOELY PAEL . Light turns her red*)

All: Hooray!

King Arthur: May I knight him now, Master Quest-Master? (*LANCING kneels*) Arise, Sir Lancing Boyle. You may ask favours of me now.

Lancing: Yes, please, Sire. Could Merlin release the Princess from her ball and chain?

Merlin: No sooner said than done. (*refers to spells book - passes wand over HOELY PAEL . Nothing happens. Passes wand over SOLDIER'S halberd. SOLDIER, raising eyebrows, proceeds to detach HOELY PAEL from ball and chain. MERLIN attempts to hide what is going on. SOLDIER exits with ball and chain and then returns without being noticed! MERLIN bows*)

Quest-Master: I think, Merlin, that you need to practise your spelling!

Lancing: A request for my mother. May she enjoy a happy and prosperous life - some way away from here.

King Arthur: Granted, granted! . . . Merlin!

Merlin: My magic will work this time. (*waves wand over other SOLDIER. He, in a trance, drops his halberd and makes for M. BOYLE*)

M. Boyle: Oh, Lancing, you beast, you ungrateful son, you . . . (*to SOLDIER*) Ooh, you are strong, aren't you? (*SOLDIER carries M. BOYLE off stage.*)

Lancing: And a favour for me, Your Majesty. May I have the honour of staining the glass windows of your new cathedral?

King Arthur: Very well, if that is your wish. And the Princess, she is yours.

Lancing: No, Sire. I wish her a long and happy married life but not to me. Thank you.

Queen Guinevere: Does that mean you are free, dear Lancing? *(She whispers to LANCING)*

Lancing: Oh, Your Majesty, you are making me blush now!

King Arthur: Oh dear. We can't have an unmarried princess floating around the palace. Are any of you gentlemen willing to be her suitors?

Sir William: Yes, Sire. Me, me!

Sir Michael: And me!

Sir Peter: And don't forget me!

King Arthur: My lady, would you care to choose?

Sir William: I have six manors, two castles and hundreds of good acres.

Sir Michael: My cleverness in trade brings in a thousand pounds in gold annually. I could deck you out in a different set of jewellery every day of the year.

Sir Peter: I cannot promise you riches, though I am not poor, but I can promise you a heart full of undying love.

Sir William: I'm good-looking.

Sir Michael: I'm strong.

Sir Peter: I'm devoted.

Sir William: If you marry me the good country air will never let you be pale again.

Sir Michael: If you marry me you can travel to distant lands and visit exotic places. *(During the SUITORS' conversation HOELY PAEL changes from a princess into a lady knight in full armour. The SUITORS do not notice this until.)*

Sir Peter: If you marry me. . . *(He notices HOELY PAEL'S transformation)*

Hoely Pael: *(striding forward)* In my castle a three-headed monster acted not only as my gaoler but also as my instructor. Head the first taught me swordsmanship; Head the second taught me archery; Head the third gave me lessons in wrestling. At the end I was better than all three working together. So, Your Majesty, I issue a challenge to your knights. I will marry that man who is a sharper swordsman than I, who can shoot straighter than I and who can throw me to the ground. *(SUITORS disappear)* Until that time I shall undertake those quests others dare not. With your permission, King Arthur, I will travel your kingdom as the Pael Knight vanquishing evil and righting wrongs.

King Arthur: You have my permission, Sir - Lady Pael Knight. Please consult with Master Quest-Master. *(Exeunt HOELY PAEL and QUEST-MASTER.)*

A noble knight, indeed.

Queen Guinevere: Lancing, come with me. I shall take you to the cathedral and show you the windows that need staining. (*Exeuntt QUEEN GUINEVERE and LANCING*)

King Arthur: Sergeant, send a guard with them.

Sergeant: Have no fear, Sire. Her Majesty will be well protected.

King Arthur: It's not Her Majesty who needs protecting. Now, Sergeant, come with me to the practice ground. I think it's time I sharpened up my swordsmanship, then I wish to improve my archery and, finally, I want to go a few rounds with your champion wrestler.

Sergeant: Very good, Sire.

King Arthur: Let us go. Merlin, some magic, please. (*MERLIN waves wand. Lights go out*)

CURTAIN