Shining Armor

A clearing. Two benches on opposite sides of the stage with armor, swords, and other knightly accessories. Lady Gwendolyn, a fair, self-absorbed princess, enters, followed by Sir Galahad, a hunk and a hulk of a man, and Sir Dave, who is scrawny but sincere.

LADY GWENDOLYN: Hear ye, hear ye! We gather here today to witness a battle between two brave knights. A battle for the affections of a lady. Me. The lady is me. Lady Gwendolyn. Having both fallen deeply in love with my sweet charms, these two men will duel to the death to see whom shall receive my hand in marriage. Sir Galahad. Sir Dave. You will now have some time to prepare yourselves before the fight. Good luck to you both.

She exits, consciously graceful. The two knights go to their separate benches and begin putting on armor, polishing their swords, or some other knightly business. A moment of silence. Finally, Dave is unable to resist the temptation to speak.

SIR DAVE: Sir Galahad.

SIR GALAHAD: Yes.

DAVE: The Sir Galahad!

GALAHAD: Yes.

DAVE: Wow. It’s an honor. I mean, Gwendolyn told me I would be fighting another knight. She didn’t mention it would be Sir Galahad.

GALAHAD: Yes, well.

A pause.

DAVE: Listen, if you want her, you can have her. I’m not about to defeat you in battle. I mean, you’re Sir Galahad. Might as well just cut out the middleman.

GALAHAD: No, I don’t think so.

DAVE (repeating): No.

GALAHAD: No.

DAVE: Right, of course not. Probably a little more honorable this way.

He pauses and looks to Galahad for a response, but gets nothing.

DAVE: Anyway, this is probably a privilege in and of itself. Dying in a duel by the hand of Sir Galahad…Now that’ll be a good story.
Lady Gwendolyn reenters.

GWENDOLYN: O knights with hearts of gold, are you yet ready to battle?

DAVE: Can we have a little more time? Sorry, Gwendolyn, I’m not quite ready.

GWENDOLYN: ‘Tis clear as crystal why you wouldst desire to be fully primed. The stakes indeed are quite high: me!

DAVE: Also our lives.

GWENDOLYN: Yes, well. I will return anon. Godspeed, impassioned warriors!

She leaves.

DAVE (confidentially): It’s just that I don’t know if I’m quite as gung-ho as I might be about being killed right now. Maybe I should have thought about that before agreeing to duel.

GALAHAD: Yup.

DAVE: So how’d you and Gwendolyn meet? Did a mutual friend set you guys up, or you locked eyes over the punch bowl at a royal ball, or what?

Galahad says nothing.

DAVE: Our parents are friends, so I grew up eating dinner with her, playing pretend with her, taunting serfs with her. I always admired her boldness, the way she knew what she wanted. She’s like a panther, sleek and strong and powerful. And I’m a…a friendly mole. What was it that drew you to her?

More silence from Galahad.

DAVE: Come on, man, you gotta give me something. I’m about to die. It would really help me relax if you’d just humor me with some small talk.

GALAHAD: Look, if it makes you feel better, my back has been killing me this week.

DAVE: Oh, yeah, of course it makes me feel better! Your back is killing you…just like I will be, soon! You guessed it, Sir Galahad — your back and I are in cahoots! Why don’t I just leave and let your back do the job for me? No. No, it does not make me feel any better at all. Because you are still Sir Galahad and I am still Sir D— Can I be honest with you, Sir Gala— Is there something shorter I can call you? Sir Galahad is kind of unwieldy. Like Gal? Or ‘Had?

GALAHAD: Sir.
DAVE: Sir. Of course. Well, can I be honest with you, Sir? I’m…I’m not…You see, Sir, I’m not really a knight. I kind of just let Gwendolyn think that so she’d, um, be impressed, I don’t know. But I’m not. I’m not Sir Dave, I’m just Dave.

GALAHAD: You’re not a knight?

DAVE: No! I just said that I wasn’t!

GALAHAD: But you’ve fought before.

DAVE: Well, of course! …With my brothers, when I was little. With sticks.

GALAHAD: Oh.

DAVE: Yeah. I played it up for Gwendolyn. “A family torn apart by internal discord and bitter conflict.”

GALAHAD: Oh.

DAVE: I’m sorry. I feel so stupid. This is probably borderline offensive to you, the thought that you should waste your time fighting me. I mean, you’re Sir Galahad. I should go.

*Dave starts to pack up his things, but Galahad interrupts him.*

GALAHAD: Dave.

DAVE: Yes?

GALAHAD: If you don’t fight…what do you do?

DAVE: Um, I’m actually sort of a wandering minstrel. Singer-songwriter sort of thing.

GALAHAD: You mean like a troubadour?

DAVE: Yeah…

GALAHAD (*displaying his first signs of emotion*): That’s awesome.

DAVE: What?

GALAHAD: I’ve always admired people in the arts.

DAVE: Oh my god, my brain is having to make the weirdest shift right now. I never would have expected you to be interested in the arts. I mean, you’re Sir Gala—
GALAHAD: Why do you keep saying that? What does it mean? It’s like, you do a noble deed here, a gallant act there, and suddenly everyone expects you to be invincible! Perfect! A human fortress! And I’m not, okay? I’m not. I try, but I can’t do it! No one can do it. My dad is Lancelot. Do you have any idea what it was like growing up in that shadow?

DAVE: You know, most people enjoy the shade. You can relax, cool off…

GALAHAD: A shadow is not shade.

A pause.

DAVE: Yeah, it is.

GALAHAD: I was trying to be poetic.

DAVE: Oh.

GALAHAD: See? I can’t be poetic. I don’t know how to say the way that I feel. I envy you.

DAVE: You envy me? Are you kidding? Sir, you can have anything you want. In the world. Ask any person for any thing and they will give it to you. Food! “Here you go, Sir Galahad!” Women! “Take my body, Sir Galahad!” Weapons! Gold! Tapestries! “Just don’t kill me, Sir Galahad!”

GALAHAD: I can have anything I want from other people. I don’t know how to get anything out of myself. Sure, I can kill people. But you can turn your thoughts into art.

DAVE: I’m flattered, but you haven’t even heard any of my songs.


DAVE: Well, if you don’t love her, then pretending you do isn’t chivalrous at all. It’s dishonest. Don’t kill me for a woman who means nothing to you.

GALAHAD: She doesn’t mean nothing to me! I might love her. I don’t know. I never stopped to think about my feelings before. I never thought they mattered.

DAVE (putting his hand on Galahad’s shoulder): What could be more important?

Gwendolyn reenters. Galahad and Dave, not wanting Gwendolyn to know they have been fraternizing, hurry back to their respective sides of the stage.

GWENDOLYN: Lovesick sons of Mars, have you primed your bodies and minds for brutal war?
DAVE: Still no, sorry.

GWENDOLYN: But I have waited patiently in yonder clearing! Wherefore do you dally in your preparations?

DAVE: Seriously? It’s been like five minutes.

GWENDOLYN: What say you, Sir Dave?

DAVE: It’s been, like, five minutes.

GWENDOLYN: I do not understand…

DAVE: The sun in his fiery chariot hath barely moved since last we spoke, sweet Gwendolyn. Prithee give him time to traverse a mite farther.

GWENDOLYN (reluctantly): I suppose the fight may wait some moments more. But I pray you tarry not more. My idle heart must needs find a love. And how can it seek its true desire while both of you still live? Sir Galahad, I trust you are armed and ready by now?

GALAHAD: Nope.

GWENDOLYN: You do not live in a state of perpetual readiness for battle? I mean, you’re Sir—

DAVE: Shhhhh!

GWENDOLYN: Truly, Sir Dave cannot pose any real threat to your filèd steel. Dispatching him should be as easy as dying in the winter.

DAVE: I’m sorry, what?

GWENDOLYN: Come now, Sir Dave. Hast thou regarded thyself in the glass o’ late?

DAVE: No. No, I know I’m weak. I know my chances are slim. But you think Galahad killing me is a sure thing? Why did you ask me here?

GWENDOLYN: I don’t—

DAVE: You want to marry Galahad? Go ahead. You have my blessing. You’ll be happy together. Just don’t make me die so you can feel better about yourself. Am I expendable to you? Are you so obsessed with stoking your own ego that you’ll let innocent people die just to indulge your self-absorption?

Gwendolyn starts to cry.
DAVE: Yeah, that’s not gonna work. What is wrong with you? Do you think my life is completely worthless? We’ve known each other for years, Gwendolyn. We’ve shared what I thought were some tender, special moments. I was willing to risk my life for you. But I won’t throw it away. I’m glad we’re not getting married, Gwendolyn. Because that would’ve been throwing my life away, too. I just wish I’d known earlier how little respect you had for me.

GALAHAD: Wow.

DAVE: Sir Galahad, I can tell you’re a good man. It would have been an honor to die by your sword. But it’s even more of an honor to look you in the eye and wish you a life of blissful matrimony with Lady Gwendolyn.

GWENDOLYN: I don’t want to marry Galahad!

GALAHAD: Great, thanks.

DAVE: You want to marry me?

GWENDOLYN: No! I don’t want to marry either of you! But I’m getting older. I’ll be sixteen next month! My time is running out. And isn’t it every girl’s dream to have two men fight to the death over her?

GALAHAD: No.

DAVE: I think usually it involves ponies.

GALAHAD: Or unicorns.

DAVE: Right.

GWENDOLYN: Fine, every young woman’s dream. You don’t know what it’s like to be a woman!

GALAHAD: True.

GWENDOLYN: I’ve been bred and groomed to be a husband-finding machine! I didn’t intend to hurt you, Sir Dave.

DAVE: Seriously? You were sending me into battle against him. You definitely knew I was gonna die.

GWENDOLYN: Okay! You’ve made your point! You are the victim of an evil plot, and I am a horrible witch! Now will you just shut up about it? For all your talk of love, Sir Dave, you’re awfully eager to hurl insults. I do realize now that my actions would have led to your death. I’m sorry. I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry! Happy? And you, Sir Galahad. How can you stand quietly by while a woman gets abused like that? Not a word in my defense! I thought you were supposed
to be chivalrous. But there’s not a drop of chivalrousness in you. Just chivalrouslessness. For the last time, I apologize. I just want someone to love me and I don’t want it to be either of you!

_She collapses on the ground, exhausted and upset. Galahad and Dave exchange glances._

DAVE: So does this mean ixnay on the uelday?

_Galahad nods. Dave pumps his fist._

GALAHAD: Dave, this might be an odd question, but would you ever consider taking on a songwriting apprentice?

_Dave nods. Galahad pumps his fist._

_Dave and Galahad quietly gather their things and start to exit._

DAVE: Goodbye, Gwendolyn.

GALAHAD: Bye.

_They leave together._

_After a moment or two, Gwendolyn gets up, adjusting her gown. Taking deep breaths to calm herself, she wipes the tears from her face. She starts to exit in the opposite direction as the lights go down._