

# **THE LADY OF THE LAKE MURDER**

**(An Arthurian Murder Mystery)**

**Adapted from the works of Mallory and The Vulgate Cycle**

**Written By**

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## THE LADY OF THE LAKE MURDER

### **The Lady of the Lake Murder**

**(An Arthurian murder mystery)**

### **CHARACTERS**

**INQUISITOR** - A stereotypical police investigator.

**AMBER** - A warden; the girl next door; kind and goodhearted

**ALYSSA** - A Warden; the popular girl; attractive, selfish and manipulative

**ASHE** - A Warden; the stereotypical “Dumb Jock”; good looking and dense

**MERLIN** - An Immortal; Older man with a kind but firm way about him

**MORGAN LE FAY** - An Immortal; Tempestuous as she is beautiful; overall not a very nice person

**GUINEVERE** - An Immortal; Beautiful and kind but there’s a dark side to her

**SIR LANCELOT** - an Immortal; The stereotypical “Knight in Shining armor” Captain of the Wardens

### **The Story of the Play**

It is the annual meeting of the Shadow Council, a group of powerful immortals headed by Merlin. Among the chartered members of the Council are Morgan le Fay, Queen Guinevere, Sir Lancelot and Niniane, the infamous Lady of the Lake. Also in attendance are three young Wardens assigned to protect an immortal charge.

As the time for the meeting draws near and the immortals begin to gather it comes to light that each of the immortals has a grudge against Niniane, including her own Warden. When it is learned Niniane has been murdered, beheaded with Excalibur, an artifact entrusted to her Warden accusations begin to fly and it becomes the responsibility of the Councils Chief Inquisitor, a stereotypical police investigator, to learn the truth and bring the murderer to justice. The penalty for this crime is death.

The Lady of the Lake Murder is a mystery steeped in Arthurian Lore drawn from the works of Mallory and the Vulgate Cycle.

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**ACT ONE**

**Scene one**

**The secret chamber of the Shadow Council**

*The lights come up on the secret chamber of the Shadow Council. UP LEFT CENTER is a large stone fireplace. Heavy wooden doors on each side of the fireplace lead into and out of the chamber. CENTER is a small, round table draped with a purple and black table cloth that goes to the ground. In the center of the table is a clawed plinth with a crystal ball on top of it. Behind the table, set in a semi-circle, are four throne-like chairs. The center two chairs are larger than the two that flank them. A fire appears to be glowing in the fireplace. As the lights come up the INQUISITOR is seated in one of the center chairs. He is dressed in a suit, trench coat and fedora. Once the lights are fully up the INQUISITOR rises and moves to the apron of the stage.*

**INQUISITOR**

The call came into my office early in the morning. Someone had murdered the lady of the lake. Who am I? I'm a cop (beat) sort of. Actually I am a Royal Inquisitor, and I have the badge to prove it. My beat is the mean streets of Camelot. On the surface it appears idyllic. Romantic some might say; but there's a darker side, a seedier side, a side I see every day and I have the pictures to prove it. I also serve as Chief Inquisitor for the Shadow Council, a council of powerful immortals whose members include Merlin, Morgan le Fay, Queen Guinevere, Sir Lancelot Captain of the wardens, and the deceased Niniane the Lady of the Lake. I was finishing up a double shift when the call came in. It was a hysterical damsel of the Lady of the Lake. She had found Niniane dead, beheaded. I wasn't surprised. No one liked her. What did surprise me was why it took someone so long to off the witch. I got my coat and hat and headed over to the councils secret chamber. It was going to be a long night. It always was when you had to deal with the Shadow Council. This night was going to be longer than most. The penalty for this crime was death. *(As the INQUISITOR exits through the UR doors ALYSSA and AMBER enter from the UL doors)*

**AMBER**

How I hate that woman.

**ALYSSA**

Who are you talking about, Amber?

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**AMBER**

Who do you think, Alyssa? I am talking about my charge the Lady of the Lake.

**ALYSSA**

I heard the two of you arguing again last night. Honestly, Amber, I don't know why you put up with her.

**AMBER**

What choice do I have? The Shadow Council's decision is final. They decide who I serve.

**ALYSSA**

Maybe you should ask the Shadow council for a reassignment.

**AMBER**

You know it's not that simple, Alyssa. When a Warden is chosen to protect an immortal the council casts binding spells that bind the Warden to their charge. At that time the two are forever linked. The spells allow mental communication between the Warden and their chosen immortal and it allows the Warden to know when their charge is in danger. To reverse the binding spells is a painful process. One the Warden, who is always mortal, could die from. Only the death of an immortal can free the Warden of the binding spells, and an Immortal can only be killed in one of two ways; on Halloween, the one day of the year an Immortal becomes mortal or being slain with an artifact such as the one the council has entrusted to me, Excalibur. Given all that I am stuck with Niniane until the day I die.

**ALYSSA**

I just think its wrong Niniane treats you like you were no better than a scullery maid. There must be something the council can do.

**AMBER**

What can they do?

**ALYSSA**

I don't know, but they should be able to do something.

**ASHE**

*(Enters from UL doorway)* Do something about what?

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**AMBER**

*(Pleased to see ASHE)* Hello, Ashe.

**ASHE**

Hi, Amber.

**AMBER**

*(Crossing to ASHE)* I'm glad you're here. I wanted to thank you.

**ASHE**

*(Confused, this is his natural state)* For what?

**AMBER**

Last night.

**ASHE**

What happened last night?

**AMBER**

*(Cozying up to him)* You, me, a bear skin rug.

**ASHE**

*(Still confused)* Huh, I don't remember that.

**AMBER**

*(Angrily moves away from him)* What do you mean you don't remember! It was the best night of my life.

**ASHE**

If you say so.

**AMBER**

*(Flabbergasted)* I can't believe you don't remember last night. It was great.

**ASHE**

*(Crossing to AMBER)* If it was so great how come I don't remember it?

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**AMBER**

*(Sulking)* Now you're just being cruel.

**ASHE**

Honestly, Amber, I really don't remember. I wish I did, but I don't. I'm sure if I spent the night with you I'd remember, especially on a bear skin rug.

**AMBER**

Well, what do you remember about last night?

**ASHE**

The last thing I remember I was with Alyssa. Apparently Lancelot and Guinevere had disappeared. I remember Alyssa was frantic. As Guinevere's Warden she didn't sense the Queen was in danger but she wasn't responding to her mental calls either. We searched the castle and eventually found them entwined together in the garden. Needless to say they were not too happy to see us either.

**AMBER**

*(With a little laugh)* I'll bet; anything else?

**ASHE**

That's it. That's all I can remember until I woke up this morning.

**AMBER**

Maybe that's all someone wanted you to remember for some reason.

**ASHE**

Maybe, I just wish I could remember. *(To AMBER)* How was I?

**AMBER**

Fantastic!

**ASHE**

Now I really wish I could remember.

**ALYSSA**

*(Obviously annoyed)* I'm sure it will come back to you.

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**ASHE**

I hope so. By the way, what were the two of you talking about before I came in?

**AMBER**

Niniane.

**ASHE**

What about her?

**ALYSSA**

We were just wondering why the Shadow Council puts up with her.

**MERLIN**

*(Entering from the UR door with MORGAN LE FAY)* Puts up with whom?

**ASHE**

*(Startled)* Merlin!

**MERLIN**

*(To MORGAN)* I didn't think I was that difficult to get along with.

**MORGAN**

Don't look at me I think you're impossible.

**ASHE**

We weren't talking about you.

**MERLIN**

Good to know. *(Crossing to ASHE)* How's my young Warden this evening?

**ASHE**

Okay I guess. We weren't expecting the council this early. Nothing's been prepared.

**MERLIN**

*(Looking around he finds dust on the thrones)* so it would seem.

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**MORGAN**

*(Crossing to the Wardens)* Have we interrupted something?

**ALYSSA**

*(With obvious contempt for MORGAN)* Not at all, Morgan, We were just making small talk until the Council arrived.

**MORGAN**

Yes, well as you can see we're here. So share. Whatever were you talking about before Merlin and I came in here?

**AMBER**

It wasn't important.

**MORGAN**

We'll be the judge of that. I believe Merlin asked you a question which requires an answer.

**ASHE**

We were talking about Niniane.

**GUINEVERE**

*(Entering with LANCELOT)* What about her?

**ALYSSA**

*(Bowing)* Queen Guinevere, Sir Lancelot.

**GUINEVERE**

*(Crossing to ALYSSA)* Alyssa, how are you my young warden?

**ALYSSA**

I am well, My Queen, thank you for asking.

**MORGAN**

It's nice of the two of you to join us.

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**LANCELOT**

*(Sarcastically)* It's always a pleasure to see you too, Morgan.

**MORGAN**

Where have the two of you been?

**GUINEVERE**

Taking a walk in the garden.

**MORGAN**

Together?

**LANCELOT**

Does it matter?

**MORGAN**

*(Crossing to LANCELOT and GUINEVERE)* It does if the two of you were doing more than tip toeing through the tulips. You know the laws of this council. Any fraternization among council members is strictly forbidden and grounds for expulsion from this council.

**LANCELOT**

We know the laws, Morgan. We helped write them.

**MORGAN**

*(Moving away from GUINEVERE, and LANCELOT)* If I remember correctly you two have a problem following the law.

**GUINEVERE**

*(Moving to confront MORGAN)* Are you accusing us of something?

**MORGAN**

I'm just saying a leopard doesn't change its spots.

**MERLIN**

*(Moving between MORGAN and GUINEVERE)* Settle down everyone. No one is accusing anyone of anything here. Guinevere, you need to stop being so defensive. It makes you appear you are guilty of something, and Morgan, you need to keep that venomous tongue in your head.

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**LANCELOT**

Before someone cuts it out?

**MORGAN**

*(Angrily crosses to LANCELOT)* Is that a threat, Lancelot? Do you think the power of your God can protect you from my black magic?

**LANCELOT**

The light of God will always defeat the darkness, Morgan, and he has infused me with his divine light.

**MORGAN**

Tell me something, Lancelot, how is it that a God who calls Adulterers sinners makes one his champion?

**LANCELOT**

A penitent man always finds salvation from God.

**MORGAN**

How droll. Any time you want to test which one of us is the more powerful just let me know.

**MERLIN**

*(Angered)* Enough! The laws of this council forbid any of its members from using their magic against each other. To do so means certain death to the offender by stripping them of their immortality.

**ALYSSA**

Isn't that a little harsh?

**GUINEVERE**

Maybe, but each member of this council wields great power. If we started using it against each other the devastation we would cause would be catastrophic.

**MORGAN**

Being a little overdramatic don't you think, Your Ladyship?

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**LANCELOT**

Of course you'd say that. I seem to recall you and Niniane were the only ones not in favor of that law.

**MORGAN**

I'm still against it. So I believe is Niniane.

**MERLIN**

*(Crossing to AMBER)* Speaking of the Lady of the Lake where is she? All the other members of the council are here, where is she?

**GUINEVERE**

She's probably waiting to make a grand entrance. You know how she likes to be the center of attention.

**ASHE**

That brings us back to the discussion the three of us were having earlier.

**MERLIN**

Which was?

**AMBER**

Why the council puts up with Niniane. *(The INQUISITOR enters unnoticed and stands UR near the fireplace).*

**MORGAN**

*(Crossing to AMBER)* Dissent in the ranks I see. Be careful, Little Warden, you're responsible for Niniane's safety. Should anything happen to her it is on you. No matter how you feel about her you are bound to protect her.

**AMBER**

I know what my responsibilities are, Morgan. But there isn't one person on this council who hasn't suffered at the hands of the Lady of the Lake at one time or another.

**MORGAN**

Ridiculous.

**AMBER**

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Is it? How many times did Niniane thwart your plots to kill Arthur?

**MORGAN**

Too many.

**AMBER**

*(Crossing to MERLIN)* How about you, Merlin?

**MERLIN**

What about me?

**AMBER**

Have you forgotten about the time she entombed you in stone?

**MERLIN**

Of course not.

**AMBER**

*(Crossing to GUINEVERE and LANCELOT)* What about you, Your Highness? Wasn't it Niniane who pushed you and Lancelot together eventually leading to your exile from Camelot?

**GUINEVERE**

That's because she wanted Arthur for herself.

**AMBER**

What about you, Lancelot? It was Niniane who, after pushing you and Guinevere together, exposed your adulteress relationship with Arthurs Queen which eventually led you to declare war on Arthur breaking the power of the round table.

**LANCELOT**

I loved Arthur. I would have taken the secret of mine and Guinevere's love to the grave. I would never have betrayed him.

**MERLIN**

But you did. You both did.

**AMBER**

The point is Niniane has caused each of you untold grief yet you let her on this council, why?

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**MERLIN**

Niniane is a powerful Sorceress, Amber. By allowing her on this council she is bound to the same laws we all are. It allows the council to keep her in check.

**AMBER**

I still think the Shadow Council would be better off without her.

**MORGAN**

The Council or you?

**INQUISITOR**

*(Moving to AMBER)* Be careful what you wish for, Young Warden, especially when your charge has just been found murdered.

**ALL**

Niniane's been murdered!

**MERLIN**

How?

**INQUISITOR**

Someone used Excalibur to behead her. The sword entrusted to you by this Council, Amber.

**AMBER**

I didn't kill her!

**MERLIN**

When did it happen?

**INQUISITOR**

Around midnight; and after listening to all of you it's obvious someone here murdered The Lady of the Lake and as the Council's Chief Inquisitor it's my responsibility to learn which of you did it and to enforce the law this Council has set down. As you know, the penalty for this crime is death. *(The lights quickly fade to black).*

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**SCENE TWO**

**The Secret chamber of the Shadow Council Several minutes Later**

*As the lights come up a single spot is on the table Center. Seated at the table is AMBER. The INQUISITOR stands behind her. Behind them frozen in the shadows are the other members of the Shadow Council.*

**INQUISITOR**

Let's begin by establishing the whereabouts of each of you at the time of the murder, beginning with you Amber.

**AMBER**

I didn't kill her.

**INQUISITOR**

Did you not make the comment that the Shadow Council would be better off without her?

**AMBER**

Yes, but I didn't want her dead.

**INQUISITOR**

What was the nature of your relationship with Niniane?

**AMBER**

I was her Warden.

**INQUISITOR**

Did you two get along?

**AMBER**

No.

**INQUISITOR**

Why not?

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**AMBER**

Because she was a Witch! She treated me no better than a scullery maid. You would think she would have treated me with a little more respect. I was appointed her protector. I swore an oath to give up my life if need be to save hers. I would have thought that should have meant something, but it didn't. But as long as she lived I was bound to her.

**INQUISITOR**

Then I don't have to remind you that once you're bound to an immortal you're bound to them for life, unless that immortal is somehow killed. Now with Niniane's death you are free from her. You have motive and access to the murder weapon. In my book, that makes you look pretty suspicious.

**AMBER**

I know how it looks, but I'm telling you I didn't kill Niniane.

**INQUISITOR**

Do you know how many times I've heard that?

**AMBER**

Look I may not have liked Niniane but I was bound by this council to protect her and that's what I did.

**INQUISITOR**

Until last night; tell me something, each Warden is given the ability to sense when their charge is in trouble, why didn't you sense Niniane's plight?

**AMBER**

I don't know; I only know I didn't kill her.

**INQUISITOR**

Then how do you explain the fact that she was killed with the artifact entrusted to you to protect her with, Excalibur?

**AMBER**

I can't explain it. Look, Excalibur was in my room anyone could have taken it.

**INQUISITOR**

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Did you leave it unattended?

**AMBER**

No!

**INQUISITOR**

Where is it now?

**AMBER**

I don't know. It was there last night but when I woke up this morning it was gone. I've searched everywhere for it; now you tell us it was used to kill Niniane?

**INQUISITOR**

Where were you around midnight?

**AMBER**

My chambers.

**INQUISITOR**

Alone?

**AMBER**

No.

**INQUISITOR**

Who was with you?

**AMBER**

Ashe.

**INQUISITOR**

*(ASHE moves out of the shadows.)* Is she telling the truth?

**ASHE**

I guess she is.

**INQUISITOR**

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You don't know?

**ASHE**

I mean I don't remember.

**INQUISITOR**

What were the two of you doing?

**ASHE**

She said something about her, me and a bearskin rug.

**AMBER**

*(Rising and crossing to ASHE)* We made love, Ashe. I can't believe you don't remember.

**ASHE**

I'm just having a hard time believing it, that's all.

**AMBER**

Why?

**ASHE**

Listen, Amber, I like you, but not in that way. I would not knowingly make love to you, not that I don't think you're attractive but my heart belongs to someone else.

**AMBER**

Let me guess, Alyssa.

**ALYSSA**

*(Moving out of the shadows)* This is the first I've heard of this.

**AMBER**

Oh please, I have eyes. I've seen the two of you together, making out when you think no one is around.

**ALYSSA**

It wasn't my idea, he came on to me. Listen, Amber, you're my friend. If I knew how you felt about Ashe I would have stayed away.

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**AMBER**

Don't tell me you don't think he's hot.

**ALYSSA**

Sure he's cute.

**ASHE**

Stop talking about me like I wasn't in the room. (*To the INQUISITOR*) And just for the record it was Alyssa who came on to me.

**INQUISITOR**

Enough! (*To AMBER*) Just so we're clear, you say you and Ashe made love on a bearskin rug in your room. But Ashe doesn't remember the encounter. That while you were making love someone slipped into your chamber; stole Excalibur and killed Niniane with it; then they left Excalibur behind to implicate you in the murder. Is that about it?

**AMBER**

That's what I've been trying to tell you.

**INQUISITOR**

That story has more holes in it than Swiss cheese.

**AMBER**

But it's the truth.

**INQUISITOR**

Then how do you explain the fact that Ashe doesn't remember making love to you?

**MORGAN**

(*Moving out of the shadows*) In case you hadn't noticed, he's not one of the sharpest swords in the armory.

**INQUISITOR**

Even a dull witted man would remember making love to a pretty girl.

**GUINEVERE**

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*(Moving out of the shadows)* Maybe Ashe was under some kind of spell.

**INQUISITOR**

Still doesn't explain why she didn't sense Niniane was in danger, or how someone could have slipped into her chambers unnoticed to steal Excalibur in the first place.

**LANCELOT**

*(Moving out of the shadows)* When you're in the throes of passion you are oblivious to everything else around you.

**MORGAN**

You should know.

**LANCELOT**

Jealous?

**MORGAN**

Don't flatter yourself.

**MERLIN**

*(As MERLIN moves out of the shadows the lights come up full)* Guinevere might be onto something. Someone could have used a spell to mask her abilities. Our laws only forbid us to use our magic on each other; they do not include our Wardens.

**MORGAN**

That narrows it down to just about everybody in this room. We all have the abilities to perpetrate this crime; including Alyssa (*everyone is genuinely surprised at this except Guinevere.*). Don't any of you act so surprised; I've known for some time Guinevere has been teaching her Warden magic.

**GUINEVERE**

Enchantments and illusions only.

**MORGAN**

Niniane knew it too. She was going to expose this secret to the council tonight.

**ALYSSA**

So what? What's the big deal?

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**MORGAN**

The big deal, My Dear, is it's forbidden by the laws of this council for any member of the council to teach their magic to their Warden, any of their magic.

**ALYSSA**

Why?

**MORGAN**

Because, like Merlin said, a Warden is not bound by the same laws of magic as an Immortal is. While it is forbidden for members of the council to use their magic against another member of the council the laws do not apply to their Wardens. A Warden trained in the use of their immortal charges magic could be used to attack another Immortal. It is a grievous offense punishable by expulsion from the council. Maybe her Ladyship learned of Niniane's plan to have her expelled from the council or maybe it was something else.

**GUINEVERE**

Like what?

**MORGAN**

I think you know.

**INQUISITOR**

*(To GUINEVERE)* Where *were* you at the time of the murder, Queen Guinevere?

**GUINEVERE**

I was in the garden.

**INQUISITOR**

Were you alone?

**LANCELOT**

No, she wasn't.

**INQUISITOR**

And you know this because....?

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**LANCELOT**

I was with her.

**GUINEVERE**

Lancelot don't do this.

**MERLIN**

Oh for the love of God, didn't you two learn your lesson the last time you were exiled for an illicit affair?

**LANCELOT**

We love each other, Merlin.

**GUINEVERE**

And we're not going to apologize for what we have done. Besides, the rules of fraternization only apply when we are Immortal. Yesterday was Halloween; the one day of the year when we become mortal.

**MORGAN**

What a couple of saps you two are.

**GUINEVERE**

At least we have each other, what do you have Morgan le Fay?

**INQUISITOR**

We're getting off the subject here. (*To MORGAN*) Now, Morgan, you said Niniane had learned the truth about Queen Guinevere, what truth?

**MORGAN**

The truth her Ladyship is an imposter.

**AMBER**

What do you mean an imposter?

**MERLIN**

What Morgan means, Amber, is that there are two Guinevere's.

**ASHE**

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Two Guinevere's?

**LANCELOT**

You're saying....

**MORGAN**

That's right, Lover boy, she's the second Guinevere.

**AMBER**

That would explain why Alyssa couldn't communicate with her last night.

**ASHE**

I'm confused.

**MORGAN**

That happens frequently with you doesn't it.

**INQUISITOR**

Focus people, (*To ASHE*) I know that is going to be difficult for you, Ashe, but try anyways. Now I believe we need an explanation here.

**GUINEVERE**

Queen Guinevere and I have the same father, King Leodegan. My mother was the wife of Leodegan's seneschal and a former maid of Leodegan's wife. After she became a Lady in King Leodegan's court he started to lust after her.

**MERLIN**

As the story goes, Leodegan sent his seneschal with an army against the Irish to get him out of the way. Then one night, after making love to his wife, he sought out the seneschal's wife and ravished her. The two Guinevere's are actually half-sisters. They were conceived on the same night; born on the same day; and they looked exactly alike. However, it was Leodegan and his *wife's* daughter who became Queen.

**GUINEVERE**

And Lancelot's lover; everything my sister had should have been mine after what that monster did to my mother and father who died fighting the Irish.

**LANCELOT**

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It was she who later caused the separation of Arthur and his real Queen. She posed as the real Queen and wife and tried to convince Arthur that his beloved Guinevere was actually an imposter.

**GUINEVERE**

Arthur loved me.

**LANCELOT**

Only because you brewed a love potion and gave it to him.

**GUINEVERE**

A minor detail.

**LANCELOT**

She tried to get Arthur to execute the real Guinevere.

**GUINEVERE**

I would have succeeded to if you hadn't interfered.

**AMBER**

How did you interfere?

**LANCELOT**

I challenged three of her best knights to a trial by combat. If I won she agreed to leave Arthur and Guinevere alone.

**ASHE**

What happened?

**LANCELOT**

Obviously I won you witless boy.

**MERLIN**

Later she confessed to her crime after being struck down with a mysterious disease; incidentally, a disease of my own design, My Dear.