

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.