

BECOMING ARTHUR

A play about the boyhood of King Arthur

By Eleanor V. Lindsay

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STORY OF THE PLAY

This tale of King Arthur's boyhood opens with a band of medieval actors arriving at a village. The role of Arthur falls to an inexperienced apprentice, unsure of his abilities. The play follows Arthur as he grows up in Sir Ector's castle with Merlin the Magician as his teacher.

Morgan Le Fay, with her servant Niniane, attempt to break through Merlin's protective barrier to harm Arthur before he ever becomes king. On his way to the climactic tournament where the new king will be crowned, Arthur must undertake a perilous journey through the forest where he meets a dragon, a damsel-in-distress and an evil sorceress. His only protection is a mysterious musician and the lessons Merlin has taught him.

Using story theatre techniques, the colorful company, including such Arthurian characters as Sir Ector, Sir Kay and Guinevere, brings to life the enchanted forest, the tournament and the battle between Merlin and Morgan Le Fay over Arthur's destiny.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(5 m, 4 w, 1 flexible)

MERLIN: The actor-manager.

ARTHUR: The apprentice.

MORGAN LE FAY: The leading lady.

SIR ECTOR: The oldest actor.

GUINEVERE: The ingenue.

SIR KAY: The supporting actor.

NINIANE: The supporting actress.

DAME PERRIN: The character actress.

SIR PALOMIDES: The character actor.

ULFIUS: The musician (male or female).

SETTING

The stage is an empty space framed by two large, brightly-colored banners. There might be a suggestion of the forest, but whatever there is should be very simple, with the flavor of medieval England. In addition, there is a wagon the actors pull on at the beginning of the play. This wagon holds props, costume pieces and anything needed to perform this play, or for that matter, any other plays the traveling actors would perform. There should be one basket with the props needed for the first scene, which can be carried DS. The rest can be on hooks or shelves, arranged so the actors can get at them swiftly and easily during the show.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This play is about magic and illusion. For this reason, the company is small and the actors play many parts. Costumes can be simple: indications of who they are rather than a complete physical reality. The actors change quickly and often, so costuming should serve rather than hinder this. Whatever they put on is done in full view of the audience. Nobody goes offstage. When not actively in a scene, the actors may stay behind or at the edges of the wagon. Since this is not completely offstage, they are still in a sense part of the action. Nor should the illusions they create - that of the dragon, the thornbush, and the tournament - be overly encumbered. They are meant to look like actors creating something, so they can remain somewhat visible.

The musician needs to be proficient on whatever instrument is used. The guitar is the most appropriate as it can approximate the sound of the lute. The flute also works very well. Percussion can also be added, either by the musician or any of the other actors. While the script indicates the use of sound, more can be added. Although the aim is to keep the production in the hands of the actors as much as possible, recorded sound to augment both the tournament and the magical sequences can be very effective.

PROPS

ECTOR: Net.

MERLIN: Cloak, script, small wooden box.

ULFIUS: Musical instrument, sword in stone, stool.

ARTHUR: Pots and pans, dish towel, stick.

PALOMIDES: Crown, lance.

MORGAN: Basket of grapes, sword, lance, magic looking glass, pieces of glass.

NINIANE: Jeweled sword, lance.

SIR KAY: Shield (but no sword), lance.

GUINEVERE: Rose.

MISCELLANEOUS: Fabric for trees, dragon's body and rosebush, if desired; masks for guards; stick horses; props basket.

ACT I

(AT RISE: There are sounds of conversation and laughter offstage. MERLIN enters and looks over the space to the audience. He turns back in the direction of the offstage sounds.)

MERLIN: Come on, everybody!

(The COMPANY enters, pulling a large wooden wagon. The actors are wearing traveling cloaks. Under the cloaks are their basic costumes for the show. They are talking and laughing among themselves, commenting on the town, the weather, telling jokes etc. The MUSICIAN is playing a happy tune. They represent a mixed group of people, some old, some middle-aged, some young. Although they are referred to by their character names in the opening, they are not yet the character. When the MUSICIAN sees that MERLIN is ready to begin, he stops with a flourish.)

MERLIN: *(Stepping forward to address the audience.)* This looks like a fine place. And full of fine people. Fair ladies and kind gentleman, and you little ones as well...a good day to you all. We come before you to present a play - a story of magic and wonder, of great deeds and incredible adventures. Are you ready to laugh? Are you ready to cry? Are you ready to shiver in your seats? Good. Then you are ready to see the marvelous and magical play, *Becoming Arthur*.

MORGAN LE FAY: We can't do that one. There's no one to play Arthur.

ALL: *(Ad libs.)* She's right. That's true. We can't. *(Etc.)*

MERLIN: I can find someone.

MORGAN LE FAY: Just whom do you have in mind?

SIR PALOMIDES: I could do it. A little makeup, a good costume, no one would think...

MORGAN LE FAY: Don't make me laugh.

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SIR KAY: Why can't I play Arthur? You really don't have anyone else.

MERLIN: You'll see when the time comes. *(During the above dialogue, the ACTORS have removed their traveling cloaks and gathered the props they need for the performance.)* Players. To your places!

(The ACTORS create a tableau in character. ARTHUR, who has been helping the others get ready, does not join the tableau. Neither does MERLIN. Merlin introduces each character individually. As the character's name is spoken, the actor unfreezes.)

MERLIN: Sir Kay.

SIR KAY: *(A slightly pompous, but eager-to-please young man.)* Sir Kay, eldest son of Sir Ector. I'm going to be a great knight.

SIR ECTOR: Kay, Kay. Have you seen Arthur?

SIR KAY: He's polishing my armor.

SIR ECTOR: I wanted to talk to you both about your grammar lessons. *(KAY groans.)*

MERLIN: Sir Ector, a kind, though sometimes foolish, old man. *(KAY and ECTOR exit.)* Dame Perrin, the keeper of the Great Dragon.

DAME PERRIN: I live deep in the great forest. But not alone. Oh, no. No, I have very special company.

SIR PALOMIDES: Ah, madam. I am on a quest in search of a dragon to slay. Do you know of any nearby?

MERLIN: Sir Palomides. A knight who loves nothing better than to battle with dragons and fight in tournaments.

DAME PERRIN: Sir Knight, I have heard tell of a dragon. Perhaps in this direction. *(THEY exit.)*

ARTHUR: What's a tournament?

MERLIN: A tournament? Oh, yes, you haven't done this play, have you? Well, it's exciting...colorful...dangerous...

ARTHUR: But what happens?

MERLIN: A great many knights all come together and fight with each other to see who is the strongest, the bravest, and the best of them all.

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ARTHUR: The best of them all.

MERLIN: Guinevere.

GUINEVERE: My name is Guinevere. I am very young and more than anything I want to be rescued from danger by a handsome knight.

NINIANE: You had better get back to work before the mistress catches you.

GUINEVERE: But I hate to sew. My father sent me to visit, not to be a drudge.

NINIANE: Your father won't tolerate idleness any more than she will.

MERLIN: Niniane is the servant of a powerful enchantress...

MERLIN and MORGAN LE FAY: Morgan Le Fay.

MERLIN: Taking over already.

MORGAN LE FAY: You were wasting time on the unimportant, as usual. And didn't you forget something?

MERLIN: What?

MORGAN LE FAY: That I am of royal blood. And that detestable little boy is my half brother.

MERLIN: You mean Arthur?

MORGAN LE FAY: Who else would I mean? This isn't a play about Jack.

MERLIN: They'll find that out all in good time. Take your place.

MORGAN LE FAY: I was meant for better things. *(Calling as SHE leaves.)* Niniane!

ARTHUR: *(Tugging at MERLIN.)* What's a half brother?

MERLIN: They have the same mother but different fathers.

ARTHUR: I don't understand. Why doesn't she like Arthur?

MERLIN: You'll find out in good time, too. *(HE and ARTHUR are alone in the playing area. Neither is yet in costume.)* Arthur, the son of King Uther Pendragon. *(NOBODY moves. ARTHUR looks around.)* Arthur. *(MERLIN turns to ARTHUR.)* You're to play the part, you know.

ARTHUR: Me? But that's a big part. I've never played it before. I've only played little parts.

MERLIN: Isn't this what you want to do?

ARTHUR: Well, yes,

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