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Opening extract from

Merlin and the Ring of Power

Written by

Tony Bradman

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Merlin and the Ring of Power

by

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Chapter 1
The Lady of the Lake

Merlin came round the last bend in the narrow track and saw a small lake with rocks all round the edge. He knew this was the right place. There was a tall snow-capped mountain beyond the lake and Merlin could see it reflected in the lake's smooth water. The sun was setting, and in the east the sky was beginning to grow dark.

It had taken Merlin months to find this spot. Had he really found the place he

wanted? He'd walked all over Britain, and had come at last to this lake in the far north. He was in the land of the wild Picts and the hills were cold and bare.

Merlin hadn't been a wizard very long and over the last year his life had been full of surprises. He had a feeling there were lots more to come ...

"Well, there's no point in hanging about," he said to himself. "The sooner I get down there and ask my question, the sooner I can go home."

Until a year ago, Merlin had been just a poor boy living in a village with his mother. Then one day a messenger had ridden into the village and told him that King Vortigern, The High King of Britain, wanted to see him. Vortigern was a fool, and not much of a king. But because of him, Merlin had found out what his true destiny was.

A red dragon lived under the King's castle, and the dragon had helped Merlin unleash the magic within him. The dragon had told Merlin it was his job to save Britain from the Saxons. Every day more and more Saxons raided Britain from the sea. They were fierce and cruel. They burnt the villages and took the land for themselves. The Britons were driven further and further inland.

Merlin's magic was strong, but not strong enough to fight the Saxons.

That's why he was here now, standing beside this strange lake. He wanted to be stronger before it was too late. More and more Saxons landed in Britain every day. Like rats, they swarmed over the land. Merlin's last hope was that the Lady of the Lake could help him. He'd read about her in a very old book of magic. In the book, Merlin had read all about the lake, he knew what it looked like, but the book hadn't said where it

was. Merlin had found the lake at last. But was the long hunt going to be worth it ...?

"Hear me, Lady of the Lake," he shouted. "I have a question for you."

There was no answer, just the sound of his voice ringing out round the rocks like an owl hooting, "You ... you ... you ..." The sun had dipped down below the hills and a pale moon had risen. Its light cast a silver sheen on the water.

Merlin held his breath and counted to ten. He opened his mouth to call out again, but suddenly something moved in front of him. Some splashes broke the surface of the lake and water lapped at his feet.

A beautiful woman rose slowly from the lake and walked towards him. She stopped at the edge of the water. She had long blonde hair and wore a glowing gown of fine green

silk. Silvery drops ran off her, but she didn't look at all wet.

"I hear you, Merlin," she said with a smile. Her voice was soft and low. He saw now that her eyes were the same colour as her dress. "Ask me your question."

"How do you know my name?" Merlin frowned. "You've never met me before."

"Is that your question?" she said. "Be careful, Merlin. I can only answer one question. Is that what you want to know? I think you have something more important on your mind."

"You're right," said Merlin. He felt cross with himself. He should have known he'd need to be careful what he said when he was talking to someone from the worlds of magic.

"Well, what is it, then?" said the lady. "Speak, or leave me to my dreams under the

water ...” She began to back away from him and her voice began to get softer and softer.

“No, wait, please!” said Merlin. He stepped further into the lake, the water cold on his legs. “My question is simple – how can I make my magic stronger?”

The lady stopped, and her eyes sparkled in the moonlight. “The answer is simple,” she said. “To make yourself stronger ... you must use a ring of power.”

In his mind, Merlin saw a picture of a gold ring on a woman’s finger. But did the Lady of the Lake mean this sort of ring? Merlin had a feeling her ring was a magic one.

“What do you mean ‘a ring of power’?” said Merlin. “Where would I get such a thing? Do you have one I could borrow, or maybe buy?”



“So many questions!” said the lady, and laughed at him. Her voice sounded like an icy river tumbling over rocks. “And I have no more answers for you.”

Suddenly she started to back away from him again. The water rose swiftly to her waist. Merlin walked into the water after her. “Tell me more, I beg you!” he called out.

The lady stopped for a moment. The water was up to her chin. “Blue stones,” she said softly, or at least that’s what Merlin thought she said. “You will need blue stones, Merlin ...”

Then she was gone. The silvery water closed over her head as if she’d never been there. A wisp of mist drifted over the spot where she’d vanished, and the water was still again, as if it was a giant mirror to reflect the stars in the sky. Then a cloud passed in front of the moon, and the lake was dark.

Merlin turned and walked back to the narrow track. He stood there thinking for a moment. He wished that the lady’s answer had been more helpful. But then he gave a shrug and stood up tall. There was no point in being gloomy. He had some idea now of what he had to find, and he told himself that he’d find it no matter how difficult that was. But what were blue stones? And how would they help him ...?

Soon Merlin was walking back down the track, away from the lake. He had been away for a long time, and he was keen to return to the castle of the King. He’d have to make sure everything was all right there before he set off to hunt for this ring of power. He only hoped that Vortigern had been behaving himself.

But the King had done something terrible, as Merlin was about to find out ...