

## A Monster Among Monsters

*“Do you know how it feels to be a monster? To be afraid of who you are?”*

*“Freya is very different from you, she’s dangerous.”*

*“Whatever she is and whatever she’s done, she doesn’t deserve to die.”*

(“The Lady” 31:46)

Hidden among the villain-of-the-week plots, typical of early *Merlin*, is the gem “The Lady of the Lake.” When I first watched the episode at fifteen, I hadn’t fully grasped the implications of the message. I was less than thrilled with the kisses Merlin and Freya shared and couldn’t bring it in me to care much for her, but revisiting the episode had me tearing up. Freya’s life is a tragedy and—though filled with magic—it is one many can relate to. She was a daughter, and more importantly, a person, before she was monstrified and cast out of the very society that made her one. She spends years in fear, killing against her will, before being captured for being a creature of magic. She is dehumanized, bought and sold, and rejected by even the most fringe of society. Until Merlin shows her love before she dies. Merlin, in her funeral, completes their dream of moving to, “Somewhere with mountains’ a few fields’ wildflowers’ a couple of cows’ and a lake” (“The Lady” 24:00). While being at its core a monster story, it utilizes its divergence from the genre to further the growing narrative of the show.

Freya is a monster. That much is inarguable, although Merlin does his best to disagree. Once midnight strikes, she transforms into a Bastet, a large winged feline, with the unquenchable thirst to kill. She escapes most attempts to capture and kill her; she is a category crisis, as she shapeshifts; she lies outside of normality; and she is a warning for

others against repeating her actions. What's unique to her, is that unlike many monsters and other fiends featured in *Merlin*, she was cursed into that life. After accidentally killing a man in self-defense, she was cursed by his sorceress mother to kill forevermore, though she remains good at heart. Merlin is the first person in years to treat her with any ounce of kindness; he is even the first sorcerer to be kind to her. Despite magic users possessing a sense of togetherness through the genocide that lasts the series, all but Merlin turn their back on Freya, calling her dangerous. Particularly surprising is the druids' reaction to her. It is against their religion to turn away anyone who needs help. And yet, Freya was cast out from their ranks. Interestingly, Merlin's kindness is not all for nought. When he sees her in her Bastet form, her bloodthirst calms. He is even allowed to touch her head before she runs away to transform back. It seems that even the blood thirstiest of creatures can be tamed when shown love.

Within the greater context of the show, Freya's death is far more important than her life. It marks Merlin's first heartbreak. She is one of the first Merlin would fail to rescue, and she's far from the last. In her death, she also promises to repay Merlin, becoming the titular lady in the lake, and guarding Excalibur. Yet, that feels insulting. For a woman whose life was marred with death, assault, and rejection, it's hardly fair that she continues her existence as a lonely spirit in an isolated lake. She is often forgotten about, only Merlin remembering her. Even within the fandom of *Merlin*, she is often referred to as the cursed druid girl, as opposed to the lady in the lake or just simply, her name. Her personhood is discounted and she is blamed for her curse.

The reason she was cursed is quite ambiguous. She tells Merlin a man attacked her.

The attack could have simply been an attempted theft turned violent

HOW FREYAS LIFE  
MIRRORS MANY WOMENS EXPERIENCE

WRAP IT ALL UP

## Works Cited

"The Lady in the Lake." Merlin, season 2, episode 9, BBC, 2009. Youtube, [youtu.be/N3a4mRgbhqM?](https://youtu.be/N3a4mRgbhqM?). Accessed 1 Apr. 2024.