

# The Table Round and The Siege Perilous

By Emily C. A. Snyder (2019)

## THE TABLE ROUND, ACT V, SCENE 1: Lancelot and Guinevere Spar

(The night after a royal wedding gone horribly awry. GUINEVERE enters the sparring field, no longer in her wedding clothes, but dressed once more to fight.)

**GUINEVERE.** Can it be: he doesn't want me?  
There's none before insulted me like he.  
Though neither have I taken aught to bed  
For reasons less of passion than of State.  
What more should I expect? He kept his word:  
Offered England, not himself. Yet I confess:  
My nation, safe; myself do lack some human tenderness.

*(Enter LANCELOT, armed, for morning practice. GUINEVERE withdraws a pace. Watching him as he advances on his target, 'til:)*

**GUINEVERE.** If you pass through, you'll reach your target faster.

**LANCELOT.** My lady. If you please.

*(He gestures for her to go. But GUINEVERE doesn't budge. He tries the move again, passing through as she suggested. Begrudgingly:)*

**LANCELOT.** That's better.

**GUINEVERE.** Yes. I know.

*(She goes to get a sword.)*

**LANCELOT.** About last night, your Majesty.

**GUINEVERE.** I'd rather fight than talk.

**LANCELOT.** I would not fight a lady.

**GUINEVERE.** You did when I arrived.

**LANCELOT.** You had your Woads atop the battlements.

**GUINEVERE.** I'll summon them, if you will spar with me!  
Or do you fear to fall, as Arthur did?

**LANCELOT.** He let you win.

**GUINEVERE.**

O, did he?

**LANCELOT.**

My Lady...

**GUINEVERE.**

Nay. Your Queen.

*(En garde.)* And I command.

**LANCELOT.**

*(En garde.)* If you wish it so.

**GUINEVERE.**

I would.

*(They spar. Fluidly, if mechanically at first. Then faster. GUINEVERE gets in a hit.)*

**LANCELOT.**

A dirty trick.

**GUINEVERE.**

Would learn it?

**LANCELOT.**

...Aye.

*(They do the same pass again. This time LANCELOT getting the hit...before hesitating.)*

**GUINEVERE.**

Extend your blade to mine.

**LANCELOT.**

And leave me open?

Would have me vulnerable?

**GUINEVERE.**

Would you rather learn; or bicker?

*(A third time, a flurry of weapons and of swords. They're enjoying themselves. LANCELOT goes for the trick. GUINEVERE counters it, disarms him, throwing his weapon aside. Her knife at his throat. The two very, very close. A deadly embrace.)*

*(LANCELOT grabs the back of GUINEVERE'S hair, pulling her head up. He's learning to fight dirty. Their eyes lock.)*

*(Until:)*

*(GUINEVERE'S attention is pulled to the side. As behind the Knight, where he can't see, ARTHUR has entered, still drunk from his failed honeymoon the night before.)*

*(ARTHUR sees the tableau. Catches GUINEVERE'S eye. Stifles a laugh—of disbelief, relief—everything.)*

*(Unaware, LANCELOT'S free hand pulls the Queen closer to him, daring her to slice his throat.)*

*(ARTHUR and GUINEVERE remain looking at each other.)*

**GUINEVERE.** I—

*(Before she can speak, ARTHUR nods; lifts his glass in giddy salute; presses a finger to his lips, and departs.)*

*(An infuriated beat. As GUINEVERE breaks free.)*

**GUINEVERE.** Another match. Another time. I'll have no sport today.

**LANCELOT.** Why hesitate? You ought to kill me.

**GUINEVERE.** No.

**LANCELOT.** The day is yours! The man who slew your father,  
Slaughtered brother, cousin—laid to waste  
Your beloved, *unimportant* country  
Kneels, humbly, at your feet. Why do you wait?  
I beg you: slaughter me. Before I see  
My Camelot conquered by a common stale—

*(GUINEVERE turns away.)*

**LANCELOT.** Turn not your back on me! I beg you:  
*Let me die.*  
Now you have all—Arthur, England—  
*Everything.*

*(A beat.)*

*(GUINEVERE drops her blade. Turns back to the damnable, damnable knight.)*

*(Steps towards him, and:)*

*(Grabs his face between her hands, digging her fingers close to his eyes. His arms widen, Christlike, waiting for her to snap his neck.)*

*(She hesitates.)*

*(She smiles.)*

*(LANCELOT looks up.)*

*(She still can conquer this.)*

*(With a baring of her teeth, GUINEVERE swoops forward and crushes her lips upon the Virgin Knight.)*

*(He freezes, unsure of what to do. Something shifts, as her fingers run through his hair. And, tentatively—still learning—LANCELOT reaches for the warrior queen's flushed cheek, stroking it softly, as—)*

*(GUINEVERE breathes in. Pulls away. Strikes him across the cheek, and storms off from the field.)*

*(LANCELOT, alone and on his knees. His world is somehow altered. He'll wait a little while, as elsewhere:)*

THE TABLE ROUND, ACT VI, SCENE 1: The Chapel Scene

(LANCELOT kneels in the chapel, praying. Quietly,  
GUINEVERE enters, still dressed in her nightclothes.)

- LANCELOT. *Ave Maria, gratia plena  
Dominus tecum  
Benedicta tu in mulieribus  
Et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus...*
- (Seeing GUINEVERE.) Your Majesty—
- GUINEVERE. Please, stay. I was...looking for some comfort.  
It seems that I found thee. May I join thee?
- LANCELOT. I am not your husband, Majesty.
- GUINEVERE. But his most loyal Knight?
- LANCELOT. And steadfast friend.
- GUINEVERE. I'd have thy friendship, too.  
And the friendship of thy God.  
...Or anyone who'd have me.
- LANCELOT. Came you here to pray?
- GUINEVERE. The stones are silent here. As everything—  
*Everyone*—is silent...
- LANCELOT. Pray. Kneel.
- (*She does. A moment. Then:*)
- GUINEVERE. King Arthur doesn't like me. My "husband"  
Doesn't—hasn't—*Wouldn't*...?
- LANCELOT. Your Majesty—
- GUINEVERE. Perhaps, you think, I've come to...*seduce*  
"The Virgin Knight;" shame my nation's butcher  
As the whey-faced, pompous, *coward* King  
Hath in turn shamed me—I could, you know.  
There was a time, before I was made Queen,  
I had my pick of Woods...although—
- LANCELOT. Your Majesty?
- GUINEVERE. I shouldn't speak. (*She turns to go, but:*)

**LANCELOT.** You came to my God for comfort. May I not serve, instead?

**GUINEVERE.** The thing is delicate.

**LANCELOT.** As are we all. Please. Speak.

*(She kneels. A longer pause. Then...)*

**GUINEVERE.** ...I was wrong to kiss you.

**LANCELOT.** Aye. Although the slap hurt more.

**GUINEVERE.** I do repent the slap. But not thy wounded pride.

**LANCELOT.** My pride will heal. My shoulder...!

**GUINEVERE.** Aye, my shoulder, too.

**LANCELOT.** *(He touches her wound.)* How deep...  
*(Realizing.)* Mon Dieu! I struck you! I—

**GUINEVERE.** ‘Twas worthy and well-done.  
And more than Arthur [~~tried with me in bed~~]...!  
Not that Arthur [~~even wants to touch me~~]...

*(A beat. Shame. And:)*

**GUINEVERE.** ...Am I woman to you, Lancelot?

**LANCELOT.** How could any many deny it? The King—  
I do not know the cause, but ‘tis not thee.  
I mean: *yourself*. Thou art—I mean, *You* are...  
*Everything*  
A man could e’er desire.

**GUINEVERE.** Even with my blade?

**LANCELOT.** *Especially* thy blade.

*(They laugh. Shift. Grow comfortable.)*

**LANCELOT.** And if I may speak candidly—

**GUINEVERE.** Pray. Do.

**LANCELOT.** If the King cannot see thy beauty—Guinevere—  
And the many qualities that recommend thee to a Queen,  
I think that much a shame.

*(She looks at him. Kisses him. It's impetuous, and immediately regretted. She pulls away.)*

**LANCELOT.** That's twice now.

**GUINEVERE.** Aye. I do apologize. I will be gone—!

**LANCELOT.** One moment—!

*(He touches her: touch for touch. Kisses her, like she did him. He's learning.)*

*(Her hand runs up his shirt. He mimics her. He's learning.)*

*(The kiss grows passionate. Almost something more. Something sweet, and tender.)*

*(She stops. And shoves him to the ground.)*

*(Not like this. Not like this.)*

*(From the cool stones of the church, LANCELOT looks up at her, entirely confused. What has he done wrong?)*

*(She hesitates; a goddess like the statues that surround her. Panting breaths from both of them. She speaks:)*

**GUINEVERE.** I—I would not force, nor take anything from thee—

**LANCELOT.** Thou canst take *everything* from me,  
If thou wilt take myself.

*(She grins. It's been a long time.)*

**GUINEVERE.** I will. O—I will...

*(GUINEVERE captures LANCELOT'S lips again, before drawing him away, to the shadows of the chapel.)*

*(Just as MORDRED enters. Sees them.)*

**MORDRED.** Huh.

**SIEGE PERILOUS, ACT II, SCENE 7: In the Armoury**

*(The armoury. LANCELOT tends to gear, as SCÁTHE wanders through, singing, taunting him.)*

**SCÁTHE.** HEY \_\_\_\_\_  
MY QUEEN  
HEY \_\_\_\_\_  
MY QUEEN HAS CONQUERED THEE

*(She exits left, humming, as GUINEVERE arrives, back in her sparring clothes.)*

**GUINEVERE.** I heard Arthur gave his blessing. And you are to wed.

**LANCELOT.** *(Cleaning his sword.)*  
He did. Gave it most eager, too. I almost told him...  
But then, what could I say? "My lord, my *friend*:  
I betrayed you with your wife—"

**GUINEVERE.** *Am I his wife?*  
I thought that I heard that toady Mordred mumble  
As he passed me in the halls. I swear he smirked.  
And though he tugged his forelock, yet I note:  
He did not bend the knee. There's something wrong.

**LANCELOT.** The world is wrong! The night that you and I—  
I've thought of it quite oft. More than Elaine,  
It is thy face, my Guinevere, lingers  
Like a mystic's dream, making all of Eden murky  
Unless I look on thee. I wake! *Behold:*  
The smallest touch of gold within the dewy prism  
Of the sanguine dogwood tree, and see  
A vision of thyself, thy golden hair,  
Unbound and flowing—*freely*—o'er thy skin,  
*Majestical.*  
O—so *Majestical*, my lady, that I'm...  
Like one transported to thy Faery Land,  
Wound within thy branches, never to be free.

**GUINEVERE.** If Arthur said these things to me—

**LANCELOT.** He didn't.

**GUINEVERE.** *(Starting to go.)* Perhaps yourself could teach him.

**LANCELOT.** *(Stopping her.)* As thou wouldst teach Elaine?



*(A hit. She laughs. As his hands run freely up her arms, back into her hair, revelling in her beauty. His fingers linger gently on her cheek, and she doesn't stop him now.)*

*(He looks at her: a question hovering in the corner of his lips. GUINEVERE nods; the answer quivering on her own. He tips her mouth to his, as:)*

**SCÁTHE.** *(Entering.)* This is *no* way to shame him.

*(They break apart. LANCELOT grabs his things.)*

**LANCELEOT.** Dinner.

**GUINEVERE.** Aye.

**LANCELOT.** My lady—*(Exits.)*

**SCÁTHE.** Hm!

**GUINEVERE.** My cousin!  
I'll be gone.

**SCÁTHE.** You'll listen, coz, and stay. *(Scene continues.)*

**SIEGE PERILOUS, ACT III, SCENE 5: “Elaine’s Honeymoon” to  
ACT IV, SCENE 1: Lancelot and Guinevere “Once”**

**ACT III, SCENE 5**

*(SCÁTHE alone, as she walks her way to Scotland. The song heavy, punctuated by her quarterstaff.)*

**SCÁTHE.**

HEY\_\_\_\_\_—  
MY QUEEN  
HEY\_\_\_\_\_—  
MY QUEEN HAS CONQUERED ME

*(ELAINE preparing for bed, enters and joins in the song. MORDRED enters with the bed things. Hesitates, as he sees ELAINE’S eagerness. He bows and exits.)*

**SCÁTHE AND ELAINE.**

HEY\_\_\_\_\_—  
MY QUEEN  
HEY\_\_\_\_\_—  
MY QUEEN HAS CONQUERED ME

*(The beat changes. Becomes insistent. LANCELOT enters downstage. ELAINE sits on the bench. LANCELOT walks to her, takes off his vest. Drapes it on the bench.)*

**FEMALE VOICES & SCÁTHE.** AND IT’S O, ROH – SOON SHALL I SEE THEM, O  
HEY, HO – SEE THEM, O, SEE THEM, O  
O, ROH – SOON SHALL I SEE  
SEE THE MIST COVERED MOUNTAINS OF MORNING

*(LANCELOT reaches for ELAINE, hesitates. She reaches for him, her hands beneath his shirt. He squirms, hoping she won’t feel the scratches the Queen left there last night. Turns her in his arms, so he’s cradling her; so she cannot see his face.)*

**COMPANY.**

AND IT’S O, ROH – SOON SHALL I SEE THEM, O  
HEY, HO – SEE THEM, O, SEE THEM, O  
O, ROH – SOON SHALL I SEE  
SEE THE MIST COVERED MOUNTAINS—  
THE MIST COVERED MOUNTAINS—  
THE MIST COVERED MOUNTAINS OF...!

*(ELAINE, confused at his coldness, tries to stroke LANCELOT’S arms as he holds her tight and immobile. The music rises: high voices and low, rumbling and wild and reaching the breaking point. As LANCELOT makes a decision. Whirls ELAINE to one side. And with a sudden shift of light, we’re in:)*

ACT IV, SCENE 5

(GUINEVERE'S chambers.)

GUINEVERE.

You shouldn't be here.

LANCELOT.

No? Where else am I to go?

GUINEVERE.

Go—drink a dram with Arthur!

LANCELOT.

No. He and I don't [~~talk any more~~]...  
I have no one else to speak with.

GUINEVERE.

Sit. How was [~~your honeymoon~~]...?

LANCELOT.

Awkward! If at all.  
The things that you and I have done, are not fitting  
For Elaine. I entered, and she sat there:  
Eager and arrayed. I snuffed the light.  
Undressed. Hid beneath the sheets and *hoped*  
She'd make request of what she liked!  
I could not stand to look her in the face.

I—

Held her closely through the night, and said that:  
“We could...*wait*.”  
Before the morning lark could sing, I fled.  
I...do not love her.

GUINEVERE.

Lancelot—

LANCELOT.

I do not love *her*.

(Pause.)

GUINEVERE.

You swore to God you would.

LANCELOT.

I swore to God I'd *try*.  
Hast thou no answer for me, lady? Thou hast my heart.  
My marriage was a sham—thine own as well.  
No priest presided over us. No consummation, none.  
We both of us are free to love...

If thou dost love...

GUINEVERE.

I don't.  
But wish thee very happy.

LANCELOT.

Guinevere—

**GUINEVERE.** THERE'S MORE THAN US AT STAKE. And what is more:  
If what we did—*but once*—was known by all,  
They'd burn me at the stake. Thou knowst 'tis true.

**LANCELOT.** Then we'll keep mum.

**GUINEVERE.** And thus betray thy wife?  
How canst thou speak of love to me, and *still*  
Betray thy Wife?

**LANCELOT.** She is no Wife of mine!

*(Pause.)*

**LANCELOT.** Nay, that's too cruel.

**GUINEVERE.** It is.

**LANCELOT.** What shall I do?

**GUINEVERE.** Go to her.

**LANCELOT.** *How?*

All that I know, have known; all that I learned from thee,  
I cannot confer unto Elaine! Cannot—*take her*—manfully.  
She is too [~~small and delicate~~]—Whilst thou art [~~strong; and~~]...

Dost thou not love me, Guinevere? Truly. *(Beat.)*

**GUINEVERE.** I—

**LANCELOT.** Hast thou *used* me?

**GUINEVERE.** *Used* thee? "USED?" I lost my *cousin*  
For the thing that we have done. Done *once!*  
As I have lost my lord, the King—

**LANCELOT.** Who does not love thee.

**GUINEVERE.** Who holds my nation in his hands. Speak not to me of *love*,  
For all that I have loved, I have betrayed.

Bethink thee, Who:  
My Father, Arthur, country: *All*. Why!  
If I did "*love* thee," Lancelot, I should not love my father  
Whom thou didst slay.

**LANCELOT.** Upon the King's command.

**GUINEVERE.** If thou didst love *thy King*, thou shouldst have stopped him  
Ere he conquered Wales! If thou didst love *thyself*,  
Thou shouldst *not* have wed Elaine, betrayed thy Friend,  
Murdered half the countryside, nor stand here now,  
Dripping from the rain to say: “Thou love’st me.”  
How dost thou “Love” me, Lancelot? Nay: who is Lancelot  
If he be not commanded?

**LANCELOT.** He is *thine*.

**GUINEVERE.** I do not want him.

**LANCELOT.** No? Then why’s thy body heated to my touch?

**GUINEVERE.** My body craves thy touch; my heart beats not the same.

**LANCELOT.** I think not so.

**GUINEVERE.** I WILL NOT HAVE IT SO.

(*LANCELOT stops. Releases her hand.*)

(*Then:*)

**LANCELOT.** What shall I do without thee?  
How look upon thee, daily, and not yearn?  
No longer—speak with thee? Wilt banish me  
To a living death of silence? Please, Guinevere,  
If thou wilt have it so—say: that thou dost hate me.

**GUINEVERE.** *Hate* thee? No! But love thee more than thou canst love thyself.  
Dear friend—

**LANCELOT.** “*Friend*.”

**GUINEVERE.** Aye. Friend.  
A title that I’ve given to none before but Scáthe.

**LANCELOT.** And where is she?

(*A hit.*)

**GUINEVERE.** Believe that I *do* love thee. And wish for thee  
Much happiness, and good health. (*Pause.*) But not with me.

**LANCELOT.**        *(Tearing up.)* I don't—I can't—

**GUINEVERE.**                                       I know.

*(They embrace, chastely.)*

*(The rain continues. And they listen.)*

*(She rests against his neck. Breathes him in. Nuzzles him.)*

**GUINEVERE.**        Once.

*(LANCELOT'S squeezes her hand. Kisses her brow. Stifles a sob.)*

**LANCELOT.**        Once.

*(A moment. They look at one another. Their fingers dance upon each other's waists, as their lips strain to kiss; their breaths entwine; laces come undone with urgent tugs; as they tumble like a waterfall into each other—)*

**GUINEVERE.**        Once?

**LANCELOT.**                        *Once—*

**GUINEVERE.**                        Once—

**LANCELOT.**                        Once—

**GUINEVERE.**                        Once...!

*(Exeunt.)*