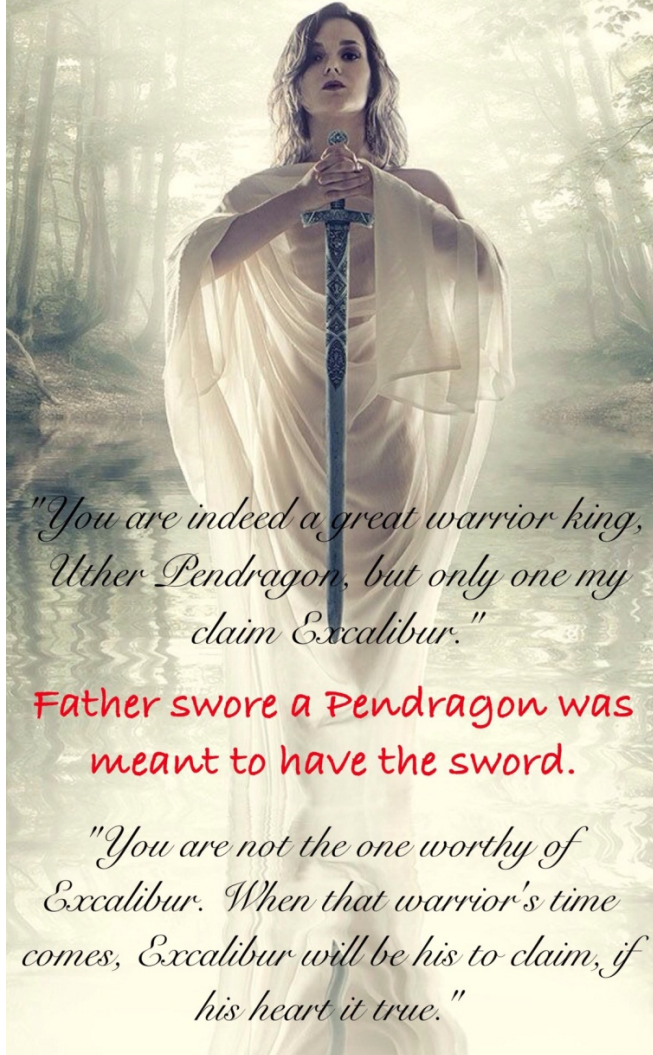


# Claiming Excalibur

L.H. Nicole



Arthur sat back in his chair like a practiced storyteller. His golden brown gaze washed over his old and new friends. “Stories had always been told of an ancient sword forged by fire and earth, but no one had ever seen it. When I was six, my father, King Uther, heard word of the sword’s resting place and was told that a Nymph guarded it. Father thought if he had the sword, it would give him the right to rule all of Albion, not just Camelot.”

“Why would he think that?” Dawn interrupted.

“Druids,” Merlin said at Arthur’s nod. “They told that the warrior

destined to claim the sword of fire and earth would become the greatest king Albion and the seven realms had ever known.”

“Yep, that would do it.” Lacy’s comment caused everyone to chuckle, even Merlin.

“My father believed he was the type of warrior to claim the sword, so he set out on a quest to the lake where we had heard it rested.”

“The Lake of Avalon,” Aliana murmured.

“Yes, at that time the lake was on the border of our land and that of the Fisher King’s kingdom.”

“The Fisher King?” Dawn gasped. “You mean he was real? Cursed land and all?”

“Yes, he was, but that’s another story.” Arthur cleared his throat. “If there will be no more interruptions.” He raised his brow, staring down the three girls.

Dawn held her hands up in surrender.

“As I was saying, the lake was located on the border of Camelot and the Fisher King’s kingdom. Father gathered a squad of knights and marched on the lake. It took us days to reach it. When my father and I stood at the lake’s edge, water rippled and wind howled through the trees, knocking both of us into the lake. A woman rose from beneath the water as the wind started to settle.” Arthur sighed, his eyes far away. “She was beautiful, like nothing I had ever seen. Her hair flowed like clear water, her pale blue eyes glittered with stars, and she glowed like she held the sun inside her.”

Several of the guys smiled wistfully, even Galahad. It amazed Aliana that they’d all been so clearly taken by the Nymph. She imagined a photo of the whole scene, and a spark of jealousy briefly flared.

“She called herself, Nimuah, guardian of Avalon, and keeper of Excalibur. The king stood and told her why we had come, and that he was the warrior of legend. She nodded but kept looking toward me.

*‘You are indeed a great warrior king, Uther Pendragon, but only one may claim Excalibur,’* she had said. Father approached her and swore a Pendragon was meant to have the sword. She held out her hands, and water spouted up from the lake toward her palms, bringing with it a long sword inlaid with precious gems and twisting gold. It was

the richest sword any of us had ever seen. Father reached out to take it, but the sword rattled and quivered before it shot away, deep into the forest. It moved almost faster than any of us could see.

*'You are not the one worthy of Excalibur. When that warrior's time comes, Excalibur will be his to claim, if his heart is true,'* the keeper explained, her eyes focused on me. Before father could protest, she vanished, bursting into thousands of water droplets."

CLAIMING EXCALIBUR (LEGENDARY SAGA # 2)

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