

The Lady of the Lake and Excalibur

When Arthur was armed and mounted, he instructed the chamberlain to await his return, and then galloped off toward the well. He had not gone far when he saw Merlin being chased by three ruffians; he galloped up to them and the ruffians fled in terror.

“Your magic did not save you that time,” said Arthur.

“It could have,” Merlin replied, “had I so wished, whereas your anger will certainly not save you from the superior strength of King Pellinore, whom you are about to challenge.

Merlin accompanied Arthur to the well, and when they arrived they found King Pellinore seated outside his pavilion. “Sir,” said Arthur, “it would seem that no knight can pass this well without you challenging him.”

“That is so,” said King Pellinore.

“I have come to force you to change this custom of yours, so defend yourself!”

They jousting three times, each time breaking their spears, until the third time, when Arthur was flung from his horse. “Very well,” said Arthur, “you have won the advantage jousting, now let us see what you can do on foot.” King Pellinore was reluctant to dismount and lose this advantage he had one; however, when Arthur rushed at him boldly with drawn sword, he grew ashamed and did dismount.

They fought until both collapsed from pain and exhaustion; their armor was splintered and the blood flowed from their wounds. They fought again, until Arthur’s sword broke in his hand.

“Now,” said King Pellinore, “you shall yield to me, or die.”

“Not so!” Arthur shouted as he sprang at him, and grabbing him around the waist, threw him to the ground. Arthur was unlacing his helmet when, with a sudden fearful effort, King Pellinore overturned Arthur and clambered on top of him. King Pellinore had loosened Arthur’s helmet and raised his sword to strike off his head when Merlin spoke.

“Hold your hand!” he said; “you will endanger the whole realm. You do not realize who it is you are about to kill.”

“Who is it, then?”

“King Arthur.”

Hearing this, King Pellinore feared that he would receive little mercy from Arthur if he spared him – so he raised his sword once more. Merlin adroitly put him to sleep with a magic spell.

“You have killed him with your magic, said Arthur hotly. “I would rather that my whole realm were lost, and myself killed; he was a magnificent fighter.”

“He is more whole than you are,” Merlin replied. “He will not only live, but serve you excellently: it is to him that you will give your sister in marriage, and she will bear him two sons – Sir Percivale and Sir Lamerok – who will be two of the most famous Knights of the Round Table.”



They mounted, and Merlin led the way to a hermit, who treated Arthur's wounds, and in whose dwelling they rested for three days. They resumed their journey, which was to the Lake of Avalon, and as they were approaching the lake, Arthur said, "How sad that I broke my magic sword!"

"You shall have another one," Merlin replied.

Just then Arthur saw that in the center of the lake the surface was broken by an arm, clothed in white samite, and that hand grasped a finely jeweled sword and scabbard.

"That is the magic sword Excalibur," said Merlin, "and it will be given to you by the Lady of the Lake, who is now crossing the water in her bark. She comes from her castle, which is hewn in the rock, and more beautiful than any earthly dwelling. You must address her courteously, and do as she directs you.

The Lady of the Lake appeared before them. "My lady," said Arthur, "I beg you to make me a gift of the sword Excalibur."

"King Arthur," she replied, "Excalibur shall be yours, if you consent now to granting me whatever gift I shall ask of you in my own time."

"I swear," said Arthur, "whatever gift is in my power to grant."

"Even so," said the Lady of the Lake. "Now use my bark and row yourself to the sword, and take it, together with the scabbard."



Arthur and Merlin tethered their horses to two trees, and boarded the bark. When Arthur had taken the sword and scabbard the arm disappeared into the water.

On the homeward journey they repassed King Pellinore's pavilion, and Arthur asked Merlin why King Pellinore was not there. "He has been fighting Sir Egglame, and has chased him nearly all the way into Caerleon," Merlin replied.

"What a pity!" said Arthur. "Because now that I have this beautiful sword I should like to fight him again, and perhaps this time have my revenge."

"That you shall not do," said Merlin. "King Pellinore is already tired from his fight with Sir Egglame. To win would bring you no honor, to lose would be to increase your shame. And to lose you might, because he is still stronger than you are."

"I will do as you advise," said Arthur, as he examined his sword once more, admiring its beauty and temper. "Tell me," said Merlin, "do you prefer the sword or the scabbard?"

"The sword," said Arthur.

"You are a fool," said Merlin. "The scabbard is worth ten of the sword, because while you wear it, regardless of how seriously you are wounded, you will lose no blood."

They were drawing close to Caerleon when they passed King Pellinore, he appeared not to see them. "Why," asked Arthur, "did King Pellinore not speak to us?"

"Because he did not see us," Merlin replied. "I cast a spell over him; had he done so, you would not have escaped so lightly."

When Arthur and Merlin arrived at the court, they were questioned eagerly on all that had happened; and when the story was told, Arthur's knights rejoiced in the boldness of their king.