

CAMELOT – A FABLE RETOLD

By

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I want to tell you cats something about a flick I seen a while ago - Camelot. They tell me some of the eggheads thought it was strictly from Dullsville. But not me. I thought it was groovy. I dig all this stuff about knights in armor and a king who is scared of getting hitched to some broad he's never seen, and fellows and their chicks tumbling in the flowers and having some fun doin' it - and a lot of other stuff. But I'm not going to try to tell you the whole story - I'm not that square!

But there's one bit - the last part of the flick - which stays with me and stays with me, and I don't know why. There's this screwy old dope Arthur, see, and he's just about to lose his last battle. Course there's a lot before that, because he was really nuts - an idealist I guess is what the squares would call him.

Anyway, he'd had this cockeyed idea that if a gang of guys were all sworn to be loyal to each other - like the Rangers or any other gang - and if they had a 'common purpose' like 'trying to make the world a better place to live' - yeah, that's how square he was - then they could trust each other and live together as friends. He didn't even want to be the boss, the top dog! He even built a round table, so that every guy was just as good as the next guy, see, and nobody even tried to tell anybody else what to do. If a knight wanted to rescue some dame in distress (how's that for kookiness!) or kill some friggin' dragon, O.K., he just went ahead and did it - maybe alone, or with some buddies. And the king's treasure belonged to everybody, see, and if you needed a new suit of armor you just looked in the treasure house to see if there was enough, and if there was, you took some. Well, as I say, you can see that Arthur was strictly from the loony bin!

Crazy thing was, it worked! For a long time at least, 'bout ten years, I think. Then one day a cat came along who was smart, see? And he knew that the name of the game was power, not this crummy 'cooperation' and 'love' and 'trust' and all that crap. So as soon as he sold this idea to some of the guys, the whole thing cracked up, as any dope would expect. So the knights got to fighting and killing each other, and mistreating the peasants. Arthur's best pal stole his chick. He was so badly clobbered he had to skip the country, and in this last scene he's sitting there in a darkening field, knowing that the other army, led by his best friends - well, his ex-pals really - were going to attack in the morning and he would certainly be defeated, and either get his head chopped off or he'd be stuck in the hoosegow - dungeon, they call it - for good and always. So he's not exactly feeling bright and cheery, see?

And then this squirt, this young kid, comes out of the darkness and starts to talk with him. And Arthur finds that for this kid the Round Table, and the stories about it, were just all he lived for! For him, Arthur and his knights were the greatest! He knew everything they'd done, the names of all the guys, the adventures they'd had. He knew 'em like a kid knows the batting average of every Yankee on the squad...

... And he was willing to do anything for Arthur, see, even die for him.

So Arthur - this gets to him, see - so he sends the kid away, and he sings a song to him telling him how to spread the news. Kinda touching, really, though 'course it didn't really get to me.

Crazy thing is that I've heard the song later, on records, and you know what - they've got it wrong! I didn't quite catch the lingo, but I remember it, and they got it wrong on every single record.

What Arthur really sang, sorta choked up and all, when he told the brat what to do, went like this: -

“Ask every person if he’s heard the story,
And tell him loud and clear if he has not.
Don’t let the memory die -
That once - this ain’t no lie -
For one brief shining moment
There was double you be ess eye”

For some reason, I sorta got a lump in my throat, even though I don't dig the last line - some sorta code, maybe. But when I think of that song when I'm alone, sometimes - gosh, you'll think I'm nuts - a tear or two runs down by cheek. I guess it's because Arthur - kook that he was - seemed so damned disappointed.

A dropout like me ain't exactly no scholar, but I got so interested I went to the library - yeah me! - to see if I could find out what happened next. And I'm glad to tell you it all ended swell.

Seems the next king loved his people, both the knights and the peasants, and wanted to take good care of 'em, see, with none of Arthur's nutty ideas. So he got a chief steward, and an assistant chief steward, and an assistant to the assistant, and some stewards from another kingdom too, to come over every once in a while, and he got all of them to working on the rules and regulations the place needed. It takes a lot of regulations when you want to take good care of people, and don't want them to do nothing foolish. And he didn't want the people to worry none, so he didn't let them look into the treasure house any more. Just the stewards went in to take what they needed, of course, and the rest they'd give out to the knights and the peasants, very generously. Everybody could do just what he wanted to do, providing of course that what he wanted to do was O. K. So instead of some knight riding off on an adventure 'cause it was what he really wanted to do, it was all handled sensible like. He would come to the king and ask his permission and the king would ask the chief steward if he or the other stewards had any objection, and he'd ask the chief scribe, who knew the law, if he had any objection, and if nobody objected, the guy could go off slaying dragons, or fighting robbers, or whatever he wanted. 'Course there usually were objections cuz most of the things these cats wanted to do, man, were weird, really weird. But now there was some sense to it, see, somebody wise and loving who kept them from making any of these weirdo mistakes. It was a great system.

And another thing. The place had gotten a pretty wild reputation under the old system so the king hired some balladeers - that's rock and roll combos to you, you dopes - to make up some new songs about the kingdom, and go around singing 'em to give the place a fresh "image," as they say on TV. It's just like if you were trying to ditch the fuzz, you'd hire somebody to cut your hair different, and forge a new drivers' license, and give you a new look that would be like a mask.

And thoughtful - that king was so thoughtful he didn't even tell his people what these great ideas, the stewards and the new "image" was going to cost, cuz he didn't want them worrying their pretty little heads about it. (And there were some pretty little heads - I seen 'em.)

So everything worked out just great - 'cept for one little thing. I dunno if you'll believe this or not, cuz it's hard to believe how stupid and nutty people can be. But some of the knights and peasants didn't even appreciate all these rules and this loving care, and being kept from making mistakes. They really liked it better like it was when that old kook Arthur was there. It just shows how ungrateful guys - and their dolls too - can be. But as I said, for the most part it worked out great, and they finally had a really sensible scheme with none of this crap about everybody being equal. The king and the stewards had the power, and they did their best to use it so that nobody did anything foolish, or anything that would break any rule. They set great store by their rules, and if need be, could make up new ones when they felt like it. So, it all turned out well.

But, you know, when I hear that song in my head, I get a lump in my throat. Sometimes I think I must be going off my rocker, or something, but just those words are sometimes too much: -

"For one brief shining moment
There was W. B. S. I."

There are times when I'm scared I must be out of the same loony bin as that old kook - Arthur.