

Ah, but rain did fall in *Camelot*

By J B Leftwich

In 1960, *Camelot* opened on Broadway and headed for a run of 873 performances.

Also, in 1960 the voters went to the polls and by a narrow margin elected John F. Kennedy president of the United States. Many in this country thought the presence of John and Jackie Kennedy in the White House was the story of early Camelot revisited.

Almost euphoric, the disciples of Kennedy believed his charm translated into greatness and the country, emerging from the gloom of the Korean War, was headed at warp speed to success and glory.

On Broadway, a talented cast of *Camelot* was singing and narrating the enveloping delusion of greatness and joy flowing from the court of King Arthur, played by Richard Burton, and Queen Guenevere, played by the beautiful and talented Julie Andrews. Sir Lancelot, played by Robert Goulet, lurked on the verge of an affair with the queen.

Accenting the aura of contentment and joy were the songs by Alan J. Lerner and Frederick Loewe.

*A law was made a distant moon ago here
July and August cannot be too hot.
And there's a legal limit to the snow here
In Camelot.*

In Washington and, indeed, throughout much of this nation, at times there was a happy illusion with John F. Kennedy at the helm and the beautiful Jackie showing off the White House on national television, that laws could be made to regulate the weather. Not actually, of course, but symbolically. Not to the extent of control in Camelot. In the play, they sang:

*The rain may never fall till after sundown.
By eight the morning fog must disappear.
And
The snow may never slush upon the hillside.
By nine PM the moonlight must appear.*

Just as in *Camelot*, not everyone in this country saw a halo surrounding the head of the president. There were those who were unhappy with the political arena, including a vice president who the year before was the most powerful man in congress but now brooded as a drone whose power was diminished and as an ambitious politician who dreamed of the presidency.

(Robert A. Caro, in *Master of the Senate*, third in his series of volumes on the life of

Lyndon Johnson, details Johnson's power and influence in the senate. Published last month, the volume received rave reviews. I read the first two volumes and I thought the first volume, *The Path to Power* was masterful.)

Additionally, the Soviet Union's Nikita Krushchev was making noises in Cuba where missiles were aimed toward the United States, creating a crisis in which the two world leaders went toe-to-toe until the Russian finally blinked.

In the play, the great Sir Lancelot's fancy turned to the queen who yielded to romantic dalliance which signaled the end of Camelot and proved that despite the laws enacted by the crown, the laws of nature prevailed. Actually, the rain did fall before sundown, and the morning fog sometimes lingered after eight AM.

In Washington, it was not the queen aka first lady who was dilly-dallying. It was the president himself who yielded to sexual temptation. But this was not known until after the Kennedy tenure and had nothing to do with an assassin who ended the life of the president and terminated a wavering American Camelot in November, 1963, in downtown Dallas.

The two previous presidents set the stage for the Kennedy Camelot. Harry Truman, honest and pragmatic, made monumental decisions which brought an end to World War II then ushered this country into a war in Korea. Bess Truman, the first lady, was pleasant enough but focused more on returning to her home in Missouri than on enchanting the American public.

Dwight Eisenhower, gifted with an engaging smile, was well past his prime in his second term during which he was beset with various illnesses. First Lady Mamie was dour and at that stage on her life radiated little charm. The White House lacked vibrancy and vitality.

So the voters in 1960 sent a young president with a younger wife and small and appealing children to the White House, and most of the country was enraptured by their charisma. The idealists dreamed their dreams, and the romantics thought that moonlight was ordained to appear by nine PM..

As Alan Lerner wrote: "I know this sounds bizarre, but that's how conditions are in Camelot."

And, for a while, so it was in Washington.

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