

1. none - THE VILLAGE OF CAMELOT, IN THE SHADOW OF THE CASTLE

The curtain opens onto an empty stage. Arthur wanders on just as a big romantic introduction to a song starts (Track 15). Arthur is about to sing when a large crowd of villagers enters noisily and the mood of the music changes to the introduction to song 1. Arthur sits, dejected, as the villagers sing. During the song the following events occur, upstage, unseen by the villagers: a sword-fight, a boar hunt (complete with horses), a man being chased by a bear and a hairy Saxon army passing through (this march past takes a long time as a small group of actors go around in a circle, crossing over and re-entering to look like a large group).

SONG 1: The Sleepy Town of Camelot

OSGAR (Dressed as a baker, complete with floppy hat) This must be the most boring place to live in the whole of Britain. There's never a battle, never a hanging or burning and not even the occasional feast.
AOIFE Is that why we're always singing, Osgar, to liven things up?
OSGAR You could say that, Aoife.
CIAR It's become worse since the death of the old king, Uther Pendragon.
AOIFE Yes, at least we would have the occasional joust.
CIAR But the outcome was always the same - King Uther always won.
PADRIG Moan, moan, moan - is that all you people can do? You want some action? Go out and find it. Life is just as exciting as you make it.
CIAR Should we take our example from Arthur?
OSGAR He just sits around all day moping and dreaming, dreaming and moping...
CIAR Typical adolescent!
PADRIG It's not his fault - he's got issues.
OSGAR Well it's about time he worked through them. He should see a counsellor.
PADRIG He doesn't need a counsellor. He's got me as a friend.
AOIFE That could be one of his issues.

Enter Donal, carrying a sign.

DONAL Top of the morning to you.
PADRIG How are you, Donal?
DONAL Very well, very well, especially now I've finished the new sign. It's taken me weeks to paint.

He holds up a sign brightly painted with the name Calemot.

AOIFE That is so good, Donal. What a craftsman you are. We will be the envy of other villages around.
CIAR It's such a clever idea to have a village sign. Now travellers won't need to ask the way.
OSGAR The name of our village will be on everyone's lips.
AOIFE Respect!
OSGAR Esteem!
ARTHUR/AR (Rising) Yes, but the name on their lips will be the wrong one.
W
AOIFE What on earth do you mean, Arthur?
ARTHUR/AR That says Calemot! It doesn't have quite the same romantic resonance as Camelot, does it?
W

Donal sinks to the floor, his head in his hands.

CIAR Never mind, Donal, we'll help you repaint it.
DONAL Weeks of work! Took me weeks, that did.
OSGAR It's alright, Donal, most of the ignorant peasants that pass through can't read anyway.
DONAL That's not the point. We have to look at it every day.
CIAR We can't read either.
DONAL Arthur can.

Enter Merlin, dragging a huge stone on a sled. There is a sword embedded in the stone.

AOIFE Oh great, Merlin has a new magic trick to show us. I love magic.
MERLIN I'm sorry Aoife, this is not magic. It's a conundrum.
AOIFE What sort of drum?
MERLIN A problem to solve, a mystery to unravel. Look here, see this inscription? It says, 'whosoever draws the sword from this stone shall be the true king of Britain'.
AOIFE There you are, Osgar. You wanted excitement. Well, this is mildly exciting.
CIAR I shall be first to try as I'm the oldest.

He struggles and sweats but the sword does not budge.

DONAL But clearly not the strongest. Let me have a go.

Again, the sword remains immobile.

AOIFE I want a turn.
OSGAR Don't be ridiculous. You're a girl.

Aoife turns around and punches Osgar, who falls to the floor, unconscious.

AOIFE Girls are not so weak after all.

She too tries and fails.

MERLIN Arthur, you have a try. You are clever. You can read and write and you are well acquainted with the history of our land. You are the sort of king this country needs.

Osgar sits up, rubbing his jaw.

CIAR But Merlin, we need a strong king who can fight the Saxons.
MERLIN Or out-wit them. Come on, Arthur.
OSGAR And what about our enemies Mordred and the Black Knights of Camlan? They're pretty near the top of the mean ladder.
ARTHUR/AR I can't see the point, but if it pleases you.....
W

Arthur takes a deep breath and, when the sword slips out easily, he falls flat on his back and is trapped by the weight of the sword. Everyone reacts in astonishment.

PADRIG (Kneeling) My Lord, you are the true king.

Others now kneel and acknowledge Arthur.

ALL My Lord. (Arthur is still struggling to get up.)
ARTHUR/AR But, I'm not sure I want to be king.
W

MERLIN (Lifting the sword so that Arthur can rise.) This must be a shock to you, but surely you will accept the honour. As sorcerer to the late king, I know he would have approved. Now, Arthur and I have much to discuss. Leave us! Leave us!

They all begin to exit one side.

MERLIN Not you, Padrig. Arthur needs a warrior to protect and advise him.

PADRIG Very well, Merlin. I am honoured.

ARTHUR/AR Merlin, what about Mordred? He is intent on being king.

W

Merlin puts his arm around Arthur and begins to exit the opposite side to the villagers. Padrig follows.

MERLIN Do not fret, Arthur. There is no evil which cannot be defeated - even the wicked Mordred. (Exit)

Enter Mordred, from the other side or FOH, dressed in black and scowling. He looks at the stone.

MORDRED Aha! So, they told me the truth. Peasants usually do when their ribs are cracking under the weight of a millstone. Damn that boy Arthur. He is thwarting my ambitions. I shall have to defeat him and show the whole of Britain who is their rightful king. (In a crescendo) I, Mordred, shall wear the throne and sit on the crown at Camelot. And no-one shall stop me. No-one.

SONG 2, The Rightful King of the Britons, Mordred

Exit Mordred, scowling at the audience.

2. none - OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE

ARTHUR/AR It's very quiet around the village, Merlin. No sign of that evil Mordred.

W

PADRIG Yet!

ARTHUR/AR What do you mean?

W

PADRIG Well just don't expect him to congratulate you on becoming king.

MERLIN Arthur is not king yet. Until the coronation he is merely the king 'elect', the peoples' choice.

ARTHUR/AR Merlin, you showed no surprise when I pulled the sword out of the stone.

W

MERLIN What is meant to be is meant to be.

PADRIG What do you mean by that?

MERLIN Come here and I'll show you.

He gestures for them to look behind the rock.

PADRIG What's this - a secret mechanism?

ARTHUR/AR Surely you don't mean...?

W

MERLIN With the lever in this position the sword can be pulled out and in this position no-one would be able to budge it.

PADRIG Wow, I think I'll patent this as a game - I'll call it 'pop up pirate'.

MERLIN Already been done.

ARTHUR/AR Merlin! You have deceived the people.

W

MERLIN I am merely respecting your father's wishes.
ARTHUR/AR W My father? But I never knew my father.
W
MERLIN No, but I did. I was King Uther Pendragon's alchemist and chief advisor.
ARTHUR/AR W But....but.... King Uther..... you mean he was...?
W
MERLIN Your father, yes.
PADRIG Wicked! Then you've been a prince all along - even when I beat you up. Why didn't you tell me?
ARTHUR/AR W (Looking confused and snapping at Padrig.) I didn't know. I was brought up by my Uncle and Aunt in the forest. But now I understand.
PADRIG Understand?
ARTHUR/AR WEN Why I was never allowed out alone and why a horseman would come and leave bags of gold for my Uncle.
PADRIG He did it for the money?
MERLIN Of course not. He was Arthur's real uncle.
ARTHUR/AR W But, did my father disown me?
W
MERLIN Certainly not! How could you suggest such a thing? He always intended to welcome you back.
ARTHUR/AR W Then he went and died.
W
MERLIN Not on purpose. He had to protect you.
ARTHUR/AR W By dying?
W
MERLIN From the day you were born there were people who wanted you dead - and one in particular.
ARTHUR/AR W Mordred!
W
MERLIN Exactly. So you see, it was important that people did not know your whereabouts. Even your parents were not able to visit you.
PADRIG I get it! You knew all along that Arthur was heir to the throne and so you invented the whole sword-in-the-stone story to ensure he became king.
ARTHUR/AR W But why did no-one tell me?
W
MERLIN For your own good. There are some things that even the king himself did not know.
ARTHUR/AR W Did he name me Arthur?
W
MERLIN Certainly, but you were taken away only hours after your birth. Your mother died shortly after you were born and you were cared for by a maid.
ARTHUR/AR W This gets worse.
W
PADRIG But that's all in the past. You must focus your mind on the present and on your kingship.
MERLIN The coronation takes place in one week and we must prepare the oaths for the ceremony.
PADRIG Oats? We're giving the guests porridge?
MERLIN Not oats - oaths! The promises you have to recite.
ARTHUR/AR W Oh, I see. I suppose I would have to. (Crossing downstage.) I still can't believe I am to be king. It feels like a dream. (The romantic song music begins again...)
W This sort of thing only happens in story books.

Arthur takes a big breath and is about to sing, when..... Enter Mordred with Murdog and a company of black knights. The music stops. Arthur hides behind the stone.

MORDRED Aha, Merlin! I thought I'd find you here.

MERLIN And I guessed you'd arrive to cast a cloud over the proceedings.
MORDRED And where is the imposter king?
PADRIG He is not an imposter. Arthur is the rightful king of the Britons.
MORDRED Arthur! Is that his name. What sort of a puny name is that for a king?
PADRIG Arthur is not puny, he is a brave warrior.
MURDOG You might like to look over here, my lord. (He drags Arthur out from behind the stone by his ear.) I believe this is the one they call Arthur. (This spoken with contempt.)

The black knights laugh derisively as Arthur is thrown to the floor by Murdog.

PADRIG You contemptible rogue! Have you no respect for royalty?
MORDRED Why, no, of course I do. But there is one small problem - I intend to be crowned king.

There is a chorus of approval from the knights.

MERLIN This is not lawful. Arthur was chosen by God.
MURDOG He can't be crowned king if he's dead, can he?
PADRIG What do you mean, dead? You can see he's not.
MORDRED But he soon will be. Arthur of Camelot, I challenge you to trial by combat. The outcome of the battle will determine the next king.
MURDOG But Arthur is no warrior.
MORDRED Then why did his friend here just describe him as a brave warrior?
PADRIG Now just look here, you can't challenge the king.
MURDOG I'm afraid he can, Padrig. Until he is crowned, Arthur is merely king elect.
MURDOG And he never will be crowned.

The knights verbalise their approval.

MORDRED Stand up, Arthur, and face me like a man. (Arthur stands.) I challenge you to combat, tomorrow at dusk. It will be a fight to the death and the victor shall be proclaimed king. (He slaps Arthur with his gauntlet and Arthur almost loses his balance. Approval from the knights.)

ARTHUR/AR W Very well, Mordred. Have it your own way - but do not underestimate me, and be prepared to die.

Arthur attempts a dramatic exit but Mordred is standing on his cloak, which roots him to the spot until it finally tears. Exit Arthur, wincing from the indignity of the situation and the laughter of the knights. The villagers tut and shake their heads in response.

SONG 3 Arthur is Really in the Mire

Mordred approves of the song and joins in. At the end of the song we hear some Latin chanting and sounds of soldiers approaching.

AOIFE Hear that? It's those Romans again.
CIAR I thought we told them to go home.
AOIFE So we did but they seem to want to stick around.
OSGAR They must prefer our climate.
AOIFE Well it's certainly fresher than the Mediterranean.
MORDRED Men, we must make ourselves scarce. We have no quarrel with the Romans.

The knights exit.

PADRIG No, you only pick on people smaller than yourselves.