

Scene - Arthur's drawing room 1980

HAROLD is sitting in an armchair. Another similar empty chair is facing him. ARTHUR is to the rear, he makes his way to HAROLD, he carries two glasses of vodka. ARTHUR passes HAROLD a glass

ARTHUR: *(Proposing a toast)* Nazdorovje

HAROLD: Yes... Nazdorovje *(They both take a sip and then ARTHUR sits down)*
Forgive me for not standing for the toast, the old pins are not what they were

ARTHUR: None of us are getting any younger, Harold

HAROLD: *(Repeating the 'toast' to himself and thinking)* Nazdorovje... Is that what they say out there then?

ARTHUR: Apparently... I never heard it mind

HAROLD: Did you like it... You know... Out there?

ARTHUR: Not really....Still, it wasn't really a question of like or dislike ... It was just one last adventure... You know, while I still can

HAROLD: You did see the new Olympic stadium though, didn't you?

ARTHUR: First port of call... You know, I actually got this vodka *(Holds up glass)* at a shop just opposite the stadium

HAROLD: *(Looking at drink)* Strong stuff isn't it?

ARTHUR: They said this one was made with horseradish of all things.

HAROLD: Well I'll be blowed

ARTHUR: I had to buy some though, I thought it would be just the right thing for our little get together

HAROLD: Just the job.... I was trying to remember...When the Olympics came to Montreal what did we drink then?

ARTHUR: Let's see....That would have been 12 year old Canadian Club whisky

HAROLD: And the one before that?

ARTHUR: That would have been... Munich... I'm not sure. Can you remember?

HAROLD: Schnapps probably... I love these celebrations of ours for the Games,they are just like welcoming back an old friend from overseas

ARTHUR: The beauty is that it's different every time... I always think that it's more like a birthday party for a new born baby than welcoming someone back

HAROLD: A leap year baby... Once every four years

ARTHUR: Yes... Wherever we are in the world... We always have our little celebration

HAROLD: Long may it continue

ARTHUR: I really hope it does. *(In thought)* You know, it's more than fifty years since I won my medal

HAROLD: *(In awe)* Fifty years *(Pauses and thinks)* More than that I think... Fifty years is what we said last time

ARTHUR: To think... That one little piece of metal changed everything for me... shaped my whole life really...

HAROLD: It reached way beyond just archery

ARTHUR: Say that again... *(In wonder)* The Times made me Sports personality of the year

HAROLD: *(Correcting him)* No, Arthur, I think you were the runner up... If I remember correctly

ARTHUR: Really? Who won it that year then?

HAROLD: Princess Alice of Athlone I think it was

ARTHUR: What the bloody hell did she do?

HAROLD: Bridge champion... There wasn't the choice of candidates back in those days

ARTHUR: Ah... But what days they were... Everyone wanted to know me

HAROLD: Shop openings... Advertising campaigns. The name 'Arthur Brunch' was everywhere back then

ARTHUR: Gosh yes

HAROLD: To many people you were 'Mr. Olympiad'.... That's what they called you

ARTHUR: *(Remembering)* Yes... Yes

HAROLD: Sugar Puffs, Holloway pills... Swarfega... You advertised them all

ARTHUR: Yes

HAROLD: Laxatives....Senokot

ARTHUR: (*Not quite so sure*) Yes

HAROLD: It went on for decades.... There was a time that if you went out shopping you simply wouldn't come home without having had a Brunchen burger at the local Wimpy.

ARTHUR: (*Embarrassed*) Ah yes, when I said that was named after me, I may have inadvertently....

HAROLD: (*Ignoring him*) No... For many British people to think of the Olympics is to think of you. In many ways you become an unofficial British ambassador to the Olympics... That's what you were

ARTHUR: Come, come

HAROLD: No Arthur that's how it was in the eyes of most of us. I know that you won the medal in *Paris* but you were there in Amsterdam too

ARTHUR: Oh yes...Amsterdam...The city of canals and pancakes...

HAROLD: You were in the parade of past champions there weren't you?

ARTHUR: That's right. And I was there in '32 as well..... Los Angeles that was, with its boardwalks and theatres . Charming city...

HAROLD: I remember the one after that...1937.

ARTHUR: 36 I think it was

HAROLD: That's right... How could I forget. That sickening mad man had come to power.

ARTHUR: Yes...Neville Chamberlain – What a nutter?

HAROLD: No, not him, the other one...with the moustache... In Germany...What's his name?

ARTHUR: Oh yes him... It will come to me in a minute...

HAROLD: You know, seeing the Olympic rings next to that wretched Swastika made me feel sick... Sick to my very bones. There it was all jaggedy and nasty. It should never have been allowed to happen. Still... (*Chuckling to himself*) All that master race rubbish...Jessie Owens taught him a thing or two

ARTHUR: Yes... She kept our spirits up....

HAROLD: What?

ARTHUR: Over my shoulder goes one care... Over my shoulder goes two cares...
That's the spirit of the Olympics

HAROLD: No, Arthur that was Jessie Matthews

ARTHUR: Oh, I beg your pardon

HAROLD: The point I was making was that National Socialism could not kill the
Olympic spirit....

ARTHUR: They carried on regardless...

HAROLD: Helsinki

ARTHUR: Ah yes... The city that never wakes

HAROLD: Then Rome

ARTHUR: 1960 that was. You know, it was me who shot the burning arrow that lit
the Olympic flame....Rome the eternal city.... that city of contrasts
with their Coliseums and... (*Can't think of anything else*)... Popes and
things. You know in '64 it was my voice that they used on the film of the
Tokyo Olympics... I don't know if you realized that?

HAROLD: No, is that right? You mean...(*Speaking portentously in the voice of an
Olympics documentary*) Years of training distilled into just ten seconds
of a race....Muscle straining against muscle (*Chuckling to himself*)

ARTHUR: Yes that's right

HAROLD: Bloody rubbish....(*Carrying on in his parody*) Here the bounds of
human endurance have no meaning. (*Won't shut up despite ARTHUR
looking uncomfortable*) It is the crucible in which the heroes for a new
generation are forged (*Adding his own thoughts*) pretentious claptrap

ARTHUR: Yes well I wrote it as well as narrated it

HAROLD: (*Contrite*) Sorry old man... I didn't realise

Sit in silence for a few seconds. HAROLD closes his eyes he seems close to sleep

ARTHUR: (*Portentously addressing no one in particular*) I shot an arrow in the air,
it fell to earth I know not where, for so swiftly it flew the sight could not
follow it in flight (*Pause and HAROLD opens his eyes*) You know
Harold, it may have been fifty years ago, but I can still remember it all
as if it was yesterday.

HAROLD: Are you having a flashback?

ARTHUR: Yes... I was remembering us all... You know...jogging in the waves off St Andrews

HAROLD: God yes. And that bloody music I suppose?

ARTHUR: I am afraid so...The British archery team. I see them in my minds eye now. The finest sporting force ever to leave our shores

HAROLD: Well apart from the 1906 cribbage team, they were bloody good, don't forget them ...In fact they were probably slightly better if anything. That reminds me... I've got something to show you if I can find it...

ARTHUR: *(Throughout HAROLD continues to fiddle about looking for something in his pockets and is not really listening)* You know Harold, there comes a time in a man's life, sometimes no more than a moment when he can simply look no better, when he still has the bloom of youth upon his cheeks, his head full of dreams for the future, and you know at that moment he has become all that a man should be. He will never be stronger, he will never be taller, his buttocks never more pert.... That summer at Cambridge, when we first met, that was ...my moment. You know I still remember your first words

HAROLD: *(Distracted)* Where's my keys?

ARTHUR: That's it, that's right... 'Welcome to Caius' and then you said 'you must be Arthur Brunch ? What are you studying?

HAROLD: Really? And what were you studying? *(Finding his keys and holding them up)* Ah, here they are

ARTHUR: I was a History major; I hoped to specialize in medieval warfare and the development of the Norman stirrup.

HAROLD: Not Norman Stirrup over in Corpus Christi?

ARTHUR: No warfare.

HAROLD: I see... What was I studying?

ARTHUR: You know... I don't think either of us really knew. But what I do know is that you were one hell of an archer *(With emphasis)* One HELL of an archer... Of course, the two of us became inseparable. I'd chosen Caius deliberately for the quadrant and the famous College shoot off?

HAROLD: What was that then?

ARTHUR: Twenty arrows to be fired across the great square during the chimes of

the varsity bell. By the time that the last of the twelve bells struck all twenty arrows must have been fired and to have hit the target.

HAROLD: That sounds impossible

ARTHUR: But it was possible... That's the thing. Anything was back then.....
(*Chuckles to himself*) Remember the Fresher's ball?

HAROLD: God yes... That was painful... Took months to clear up

ARTHUR: Those Cambridge years, were so special. I always felt we were as blossoming flowers reaching for the glittering prizes.... And my God the drinking we did...

HAROLD: God yes... I suppose that's where we got the taste for it (*Holds up his empty glass*)

ARTHUR: Fancy another? (*ARTHUR tops up the glasses*)

HAROLD: Don't mind if I do (*Remembering*) I think, if I remember rightly, I joined the 'French Society'

ARTHUR: That's right... And I joined the 'Carnivore Club'

HAROLD: (*Laughing*) I remember you auditioning for the 'Gilbert and Sullivan Society' as well

ARTHUR: I can't remember now... It was so long ago

HAROLD: Little Buttercup I think it was...

ARTHUR: (*Slightly annoyed*) Yes well there weren't so very many women about in those days. Anyway, if I'm honest, I don't think my mind strayed very much from bows and arrows and the college shoot off...

HAROLD: You were always single-minded I'll grant you that, Arthur

ARTHUR: A lot of people thought I was a bit.... standoffish... Maybe even a bit of a swank

HAROLD: 'Swank' eh?....Well, it's probably best you think that's what they were shouting

ARTHUR: How does it go now...? (*He remembers and then in a reverie*)

Bring me my bow of burning gold
Bring me my arrows of desire
Bring me my spears o'clouds unfold

HAROLD: (*Not paying any attention to ARTHUR's recitation*) Bring me my brief

case old man.. It's over there... Got something to show you

ARTHUR gets to his feet and goes to collect the briefcase

ARTHUR: I'll always remember the College Shoot off. You know, when he said 'Pull back', I thought he meant pull back the bow... I didn't realize he was telling the crowd to move

HAROLD: Could have happened to anyone... How long was the Dean of the faculty in intensive care?

ARTHUR: Two weeks. They thought he wouldn't live, I prayed for him every day

HAROLD: You were always a religious soul weren't you? I'd quite forgotten that

ARTHUR: That's right. Proper religion too... Not like the namby-pamby nonsense of today. I took it seriously, I'd never compete on a.... What day was it?

HAROLD: Sunday.

ARTHUR: Sunday? Are you sure?

HAROLD: You should remember that... I do. At home, when I was a child, we were always brought up to be really, really miserable on Sundays.

ARTHUR: We were the same (*ARTHUR passes HAROLD the briefcase*)

HAROLD: On the Sabbath we would just sit about and... well, not really do anything much. Just be miserable. Occasionally there would be a few songs

ARTHUR: What, hymns and the like?

HAROLD: Anything really... My mother always enjoyed a few rugby songs actually, after she got back from the Kings Arms

ARTHUR: You know, hearing stories like that... Well, you make my childhood seem quite privileged... My parents were so bloody rich and your Mother... Well she sounds so very poor...

HAROLD: Well... Money is not everything

ARTHUR: I am sure that you were rich in other ways. More important ways.

HAROLD: No, not really... They were difficult times, I can't deny it. And it was a rough neighborhood too. As a child I always used archery as a defence mechanism, if the tough kids at school wanted a fight I would say ..."Certainly, I'll give you a fight. But not here... I'll give you a fight on the Archery court". That usually did the trick...

ARTHUR: That taught 'em

HAROLD: It certainly did (*Pause*) And then, after I had extracted the arrows from the various orifices of my body, I would go back home to dream of the Olympics. Paris 1924... Some nights, in my mind's eye I could see that Olympic medal there in front of me. I'd close my eyes and there it would be.... Glittering just out of reach.

ARTHUR: (*Rather smugly has an idea*) Close them now

HAROLD: What?

ARTHUR: Close your eyes. I've got a surprise... Go on Harold, indulge me

HAROLD: Very well (*HAROLD shuts his eyes. ARTHUR gets to his feet and goes to retrieve something from the rear of the stage*) Paris 1924 how exotic that sounded. I'd never even seen a baguette, never used a bidet... Imagine the adventure? You know, the Eiffel Tower, the Moulin Rouge, the exotic postcards... What a place it was.... Can I open my eyes yet?

ARTHUR: (*He has collected the gold medal*) Just a few more moments (*He puts the Gold Medal around his own neck*)

HAROLD: You know... I know that in the end you won the medal and I never got there in '24 but you were always so good about that.... So sensitive, you never flounced about in your medal... Never rubbed my nose in it... Can I open them now?

ARTHUR: Just a moment (*Hastily snatches off the medal and sticks it down the side of the chair*) Ok

HAROLD: (*Lost interest in the surprise*) Who was that woman you had as a trainer? that Italian woman... Remind me

ARTHUR: Eugenie Topolini

HAROLD: God she was a tartar

ARTHUR: She was... But she was also the best.

HAROLD: Unusual methods...

ARTHUR: Yes, she would say to me, 'When you look at the Americans what is it that you see?'

HAROLD: And what did you see?

ARTHUR: Absolute belief in themselves... They were a trifle brash for my tastes but Topolini would say that they were winners because they behaved

like winners. She'd make me Look at them in their modern clothes and then look at myself in my tweeds and spats... In my long underpants and my string vest... My walking cane and straw hat and she'd say. 'You need to get rid of these things'

HAROLD: (*Disgusted*) What? No hat? Back then that would have been madness

ARTHUR: Quite

HAROLD: I mean, what would you throw in the air if you won?

ARTHUR: She would ask me who from the American team was my biggest rival?

HAROLD: Elsie Bannen I should imagine?

ARTHUR : Yes, And from Europe it was Svetlana

HAROLD: And Thomas Leveski. He would still have been European champion at that time

ARTHUR: Yes... They called him 'The Swiss William Tell'

HAROLD: That's right....I don't know why really, the actual William Tell was Swiss wasn't he?

ARTHUR: Topolini would say to me that I needed to watch them all. That I needed to know every move they were going to make even before they made it

HAROLD: Crikey

ARTHUR: She said that I needed to know every mark on their bodies. When I ate I needed think of them, when I drank I had to think of them. I even had to imagine them in bed with me: Thomas Leveski and Deadeye Elsie Bannen

HAROLD: (*Disgusted*) What both at once?

ARTHUR: Yes, and Svetlana. She even had me imagine them all leering at me, taunting me

HAROLD: What? for being so short you mean?

ARTHUR: (*Offended*) I'm not short

HAROLD: Sorry old man, I thought you were

ARTHUR: Topolini was rude, she could be abrasive too...

HAROLD: God yes.... And ugly... Don't forget that

ARTHUR: Yes... It's true, she wasn't much of a looker when all said and done, but she was also the most advanced and clear thinking coach of her generation...

HAROLD: She had a brilliant archery brain, I'll grant you that

ARTHUR: Brilliant... She could have represented Britain herself...had she not been... You know.... Italian. With her help, well I was in the best shape I had ever been. The only cloud on the horizon back in '24 was in the team event. I wanted you to be there... My dear old Harold

HAROLD: *(Nods for a moment, remembering)* Where was I then?

ARTHUR: As usual you had had rotten luck... you'd got the qualifying standard for the Olympics with flying colours, but once again you were struggling with injury. Your groin had popped out *(HAROLD glances at his flies)*. You were as brave as you always were... You tried to keep it to yourself but the swelling was not a pretty sight.

HAROLD: It's all a bit hazy now... I do remember coming down to the docks to see you off though. *(Remembers something)* Ah...That's what I was going to show you *(He unlocks the briefcase with the keys he found earlier, and gets out a photograph which he shows to ARTHUR)*

ARTHUR: *(Delighted)* Where did you get that?

HAROLD: Found it in my old papers

ARTHUR: God, there we all are... Must have been Dover

HAROLD: Portsmouth I think

ARTHUR: We look so young... Of course it would have been a long trip to Paris back in those days

HAROLD: Bloody long... Of course France was further away back then

ARTHUR: Everything was. I remember that I passed the time on the long voyage to Paris having a cup of tea with a couple of the lads from the origami team... *(Pointing at the picture)* Look there they are, they're the ones in the paper hats. I remember that the boat dropped us off at the Olympic village, we were among the very first there, but it soon began to fill up with athletes from every country.

HAROLD: That must have been very special to have been there. Moving really. There were people from every race and creed on the planet, all equal under God's gaze each freed from any petty prejudices... That, to me, is the very essence of the Olympic movement

ARTHUR: Yes well unfortunately, I had to share with some froggies, which was a

bit of a nuisance. And next door were really noisy, they were the Mongolese charades team as I recall. World record holders at both the team and individual events.

HAROLD: No archers about then?