

NECTAR

by

Liz Crow

Liz Crow
Roaring Girl Productions
1c Birchall Road
Bristol BS6 7TW
(0117) 9446882
Liz@roaring-girl.com

Draft dated: 18 June 2005

1

INT. WALTER'S SITTING ROOM, PRESENT DAY - NIGHT

1

MUSIC: 'The Honeysuckle and the bee'

The room is hushed and dim; slightly shabby, through being well lived in, rather than not cared for.

Our gaze moves around, alighting on each object, like a bee gathering pollen: a photograph of a man and woman, swimming trunks on the radiator, a wedding anniversary paperweight, half hidden swimming trophies on a mantle-piece filled with condolence cards - then across the fireplace to see:

WALTER, aged 91, recently widowed, sitting in a chair illuminated by a pool of light from a standard lamp nearby. He holds a glass of whisky, swirling it to catch the light, inhaling then sipping, savouring. This is a nightly ritual; a time for contemplation - though it is reflective rather than melancholy.

TITLE: NECTAR

2

EXT. SWIMMING POOL, 1931 - DAY

2

SOUND: COACH's whistle blasts.

A churning wake of water left by 17-year old WALTER. We see him from behind as he powers home.

Reaching the deep end, he lifts himself out and sits on the pool edge, breathing deeply. He raises his head to look back at the other lads, swimming hard but trailing well behind.

The lads haul themselves from the water one by one, out of breath, but full of joie de vivre.

Standing, arms folded, legs akimbo, near the pool edge, COACH holds a stopwatch. He lets loose an affectionate tirade.

COACH

Call yerselves swimmers? Johnny
Weissmuller was doin' the 50 in 23-
dead when you lot was - Aah, go on,
get yerselves out of here.

Laughing and jostling, the lads move toward the changing cubicles.

Coach looks admiringly at Walter, who sits quietly at the pool edge, absorbed in the water. Coach walks along the pool side, then leans down to touch Walter on the shoulder. Walter looks up to his face, intense concentration. Coach speaks with exaggerated lip patterns and enthusiastic but random gesticulation.

COACH (cont'd)

Well done, Walter mi'boy.

He holds his stopwatch up to Walter.

COACH (cont'd)
Right on target. The Nationals are
yours.

As he straightens back up, he places a hand on Walter's
shoulder and turns away slightly.

COACH (cont'd)
(Spoken more to himself
than Walter)
Ahh, your life's in the water, son.
Go where I never could.

Walter twists to look at him.

COACH (cont'd)
(To Walter, motioning to
the pool and holding up
two fingers)
Gimme two more lengths.

As Walter turns back to the pool, we see beyond to the water.

3 INT. DEAF CLUB, 1931 - DAY 3

We see young female hands practising fingerspelling, still
slightly hesitant. They belong to GLORIA.

GLORIA
(fingerspelling)
G-L-O-R-I-A

4 INT. CHANGING CUBICLES, 1931 - DAY 4

LAD 1 races around the poolside toward the changing cubicles.
The other lads are fully dressed, gathering their belongings
and larking about outside the cubicles - busy in towel fights
and running in and out of the cubicles.

LAD 1
Walt!

Lad 1 throws open the cubicle door where Walter, now dressed,
is sitting on a bench. Walter is putting on his hearing aids.
He does it with familiarity - though they're a fiddle and
cumbersome.

LAD 1 (cont'd)
Walt, they're getting a charabanc
(he mimes a steering wheel). When
you're swimming... (mimes swimming)
we'll be there to cheer you on
(mimes cheering).

The effort of lipreading shows on Walter's face, intense
concentration and furrowed brow.

LAD 2 tips his head round the cubicle door.

LAD 2
(jabbing his finger
towards the hearing aid)
Are you switched on?

WALTER
(small irritation)
Yeah. Doesn't make that much
difference.

Lad 1 looks confused. He crouches down and taps Walter's knee to get his attention.

LAD 1
You're gonna win.

Walter smiles at him, though his joy is reserved.

All except Walter, who is pulling on his shoes, make to leave.

LAD 2
(to the other Lads)
And then he'll be away...

Lad 2 gives him a friendly shove as he goes.

LAD 2 (cont'd)
Yawl be away from this place.

Walter laughs reservedly and nods his understanding. The lads leave, chattering as they make social plans.

WALTER
(responding to Lad 2, but
very quietly)
Yeah.

Walter watches them go. He has a wistful look.

5

INT. DEAF CLUB, 1931 - ANOTHER DAY - DAY

5

Gloria sits next to WOMAN, each turned slightly towards the other. We see their hands and the bottom halves of their faces. Woman is teaching Gloria to sign. She demonstrates, then Gloria imitates, repeating it a few times to get the hang of it.

WOMAN
Good - luck.

As the sign becomes more fluid, they break into smiles.

WOMAN (cont'd)
Good.

Gloria turns to Woman and beams.

6

EXT. SWIMMING POOL, 1931 - DAY

6

It's crack of dawn. Walter stands fully dressed at the deep end. He looks around, checking he is alone. He removes his hearing aids, pausing to savour the peace. He strips quickly, impatiently, to his swimming costume, leaving his clothes in an untidy pile.

He bends to pull his hand back and forth through the water, then scoops it high to fall through his fingertips. Checking again that he is alone, he stands for a moment and inhales deeply as he gazes over the water. Then he jumps in deep, rising to the surface with a look of deep contentment.

He pushes off from the side and swims breaststroke leisurely for a few strokes, then rolls onto his back. He floats, sculling, first eyes closed, then gazing up to the sky, watching the patterns of light. Walter's love of the water and its sensuality are tangible.

From the corner of his eye he sees movement. Coach has emerged from the changing room and stops to look at Walter with consternation - why isn't he training? Immediately, Walter rolls onto his front, swimming strongly in crawl, back in competitor mode. In the background, Coach nods, reassured, and continues walking. Walter carries on swimming.

7

INT. DEAF CLUB, 1931 - ANOTHER DAY - DAY

7

Gloria sits with Woman, both turned to face each other. We see their upper bodies and faces.

WOMAN
(signed slowly to
demonstrate)
...M-I-S-S-E-D.

GLORIA
(signed very slowly)
You'll be missed.

Woman prompts Gloria, then nods encouragingly as she repeats the phrase with growing competence. Gloria nods. She's ready.

8

EXT. SWIMMING POOL, 1931 - DAY

8

Damp from swimming, a towel round his shoulders, hearing aids back on, Walter is seated on a bench with a local newspaper REPORTER. Reporter speaks his questions, but writes them in a notebook when they are not clear to Walter. Walter speaks his responses and Reporter makes notes in shorthand.

Coach is sweeping all around the bench so that he can keep tabs on the interview.

REPORTER
So what happens when you win?

Walter does not understand.

REPORTER (cont'd)
What happens when you win?

Walter is still not understanding him. Reporter writes the question in his notebook and shows it to Walter.

REPORTER (cont'd)
When you win...

WALTER
Loughborough. I'll go to
Loughborough.

COACH
(butting in)
Harry Koskie'll be training 'im.
All the new scientific methods. And
then it's off to Los Angeles next
year for The Games. It's all set
up.

REPORTER
(spoken, returning his
attention to Walter)
Five golds is the record, isn't it?
(He holds up five fingers.) Are you
gonna beat that then?

Walter does not understand. Reporter writes and shows his notebook to Walter: "5 gold medals to beat".

WALTER
Oh... (he registers the question, but
hesitates a touch too long) Ah...

REPORTER
(to Coach, amused)
You wanna watch this one.

COACH
(firm, putting Reporter
back in his place)
Nah. Swimming and winning's what
Walter does. Can't separate 'em.

Coach bangs the brush on the floor decisively and leans on the handle.

COACH (cont'd)
Right, I need 'im back in the
pool. You finished?

Reporter knows he's slightly over-stepped the mark and retreats. Mildly amused, he knows what's going on here, that it's really Coach's race.

REPORTER

Just the photograph. Let's have the two of you.

Reporter motions to the bench. Coach stands behind Walter, proprietorial hands on his shoulder. Walter glances at Coach's hands uncomfortably but almost imperceptibly. Coach doesn't pick up on this.

They pose for the photograph, Walter looking serious and slightly vulnerable, Coach looking proud and assured. The camera bulb flashes.

9

EXT. FRUIT & VEGETABLE BARROW, 1931 - DAY

9

LOCAL MAN 1 buys a local newspaper from the newspaper stand, reading as he walks along and looking pleased with what he is reading.

Walter is at his fruit and vegetables from a barrow. He is reading his copy of 'The American Crawl' by Johnny Weissmuller, well-thumbed and heavily bookmarked.

As Local Man 1 nears Walter, he holds the newspaper aloft. The article bears the headline 'Local boy set for swimming glory'. As he moves towards Walter, excitedly pointing at the article, we see the photograph of Walter with Coach.

Several PASSERS BY slap Walter on the back, smiling broadly, to wish him well. Walter nods and smiles, not straining to lipread precise meaning, trying to let their comments wash over him.

As Local Man 1 reaches the barrow, he folds the newspaper and tucks it under his arm.

LOCAL MAN 1

You've a talent, Walter. Get out there and win for all of us.

As Local Man 1 speaks, Walter continues to smile and nod, but fiddles with his hearing aid, tapping the microphone, looking distracted and frustrated.

LOCAL MAN 2 walks over to the barrow and greets Local Man 1, slapping him heartily on the back and shaking his hand. He looks at Walter, point to his hearing aid.

LOCAL MAN 2

Got those hearing aids on?

WALTER

(irritated)

Yes

Walter gives the microphone one more shake, then gives up on it and puts it back in place.

As the Local Men watch this, Gloria comes up behind them, catches Walter's eye in shared exasperation at what they are saying. She points to the apples on the barrow and Walter begins to place apples in a paper bag.

Local Man 2 bends towards the microphone.

LOCAL MAN 2

We're that proud we got them for
yew. Make all the difference
(addressed to people in general).

Walter goes back to placing apples in the paper bag. Local Man 1 pats Walter on the shoulder and the two men begin to turn away.

LOCAL MAN 1

(an aside to Local Man 2)
You got to hand it to 'im, the
boy's got courage.

GLORIA

(Spoken over her shoulder,
slightly acidly, playing
with their prejudices)
Oh ah. It's a blessing 'e can swim
like that.

There's a blast of feedback from Walter's hearing aid.

LOCAL MAN 2

(both acknowledging and
reprimanding)
Gloria.

Both men drift away.

Gloria turns to Walter, pushing away exasperation. Walter is fiddling once more with his hearing aid, then switches it off in disgust. Gloria touches his arm and hold up her palm to stop him.

GLORIA

It's okay.

Gloria uses rudimentary sign language, supported by mime, finger spelling and speech. She's the only one who communicates directly to him, in sign and meaning. It takes courage to reveal herself (and if she doesn't do it now, she'll probably never dare).

GLORIA (cont'd)

I want to tell you good luck.

Walter is stunned. No one hearing has signed to him before.

WALTER
You - signing...?

After 'you', he tucks the bag of apples under his arm to free his hands for signing. Gloria stands, blushing and looking pleased with herself.

WALTER (cont'd)
No one's ever signed to me before.

GLORIA
I've been learning.

A beat. Walter doesn't know how to respond. Gloria tries to move the conversation to something more neutral.

GLORIA (cont'd)
Everyone's talking. They all say
you'll win.

WALTER
(nodding ruefully and
signing)
Talk, talk, talk, talk.

Both laugh, tentatively, knowingly.

Another pause.

GLORIA
Well. If it makes you happy -
that's all that matters.
[PAUSE](softly, sadly) Yawl be
missed.

She can't stop a fleeting look of misery. She looks away briefly, then back to Walter, searching for a clue to his response. There's a maelstrom of emotions on Walter's face. Then he pulls himself together: takes the bag of apples from under his arm and clutching it tightly, holds it out to her, arm straight out - holding the encounter at bay.

10 EXT. NATIONALS SWIMMING POOL, 1931 - DAY

10

It is the National 100 yards Free Style swimming championships.

Shots of race preparation - two OFFICIALS measure the course and drive flag stakes into the ground, a REFEREE gets into position near to a table with trophy and certificates. Spectators, dressed up for a day out, fill the stands and buy raffle tickets for the 'Olympic Fund'. There is an air of excitement and festivity overlaying the serious preparation. A band plays jolly music.

We see Coach and Gloria amongst the home crowd: Coach looks confident — this is to be his moment of glory — while Gloria bites her lip.

INTERCUT WITH:

11 INT. NATIONALS CHANGING ROOM, 1931 - DAY 11

All around Walter, the other competitors are getting ready. Walter is sitting on a bench, his bag next to him. He removes his hearing aids and the sounds dim. We see the relief, as he rubs his ears and closes his eyes briefly at the hush. He undresses, standing to remove his trousers; his swimming costume underneath.

Walter stuffs his clothes and hearing aids into his bag, where he finds an envelope with his name on it. He smiles, opens it and takes out a card. On the front is a picture of Johnny Weissmuller. Johnny Weissmuller's name has been crossed out and Walter's written in its place. Walter sits back on the bench, laughing.

He opens the card. Inside, it reads "Good luck, son. Keep focused and she's yours.". His shoulders hang; he's deflated. He sits back on the bench and gives a sigh, looking as though he might weep. He places the card back in the envelope and just sits for moment, then tucks the envelope back in the bag. At the same time, he pulls out the hearing aids.

Walter stands decisively and moves to the door, dipping momentarily to place the ear pieces in the bin. His action is subtle, surreptitious, undetected by the other boys. He grasps the door handle firmly, taking a deep breath and briefly closing his eyes, then opens the door determinedly, all ready for the race.

12 EXT. NATIONALS SWIMMING POOL, 1931 - DAY 12

SOUND: Crowd's pre-race anticipation. The band quiets ready for the race.

The competitors are lined along the pool's edge. Behind them, on the bleachers, the spectators, including Walter's home crowd, quieten.

REFEREE

Take your mark. Go.

On 'Go', the referee drops his arm as Walter's signal. The boys dive in. They swim a mixture of 'Free Style' strokes — side, breast, Trudgeon, crawl.

Walter swims crawl. He is swimming well, closing in on the lead. The home crowd yells support.

Walter swims with ever more focus. The home crowd is standing, shouting support, excitement mounting.

Walter reaches the end of the pool, turns swiftly and smoothly, ready for the last lap. As he kicks away, he is in the lead, swimming 'against the tide' of the other competitors as they approach the end of their first length.

Walter swims on, now strongly in the lead: set to win.

In flashback, Walter sees Gloria.

GLORIA V/O
If it makes you happy.

Walter falters. His breath breaks rhythm, a kind of 'Huh'. The home crowd around her knows something is amiss, but doesn't know it's over.

Walter fights to do what's expected of him and get his stroke back. The crowd sounds fade away.

WALTER
(anguished)
No!

He's swimming hard again, back on course.

In flashback, Walter sees Coach.

COACH
Swimming and winning's what Walter
does.

Walter's concentration has gone. Wild-eyed, he searches for Gloria in the crowd. He finds her, standing on one of the bleachers, raised slightly above the crowd. She signs to him.

GLORIA
(signed)
I'll miss you.

We see the emotions on Walter's face as he makes his choice. He stops swimming altogether, treads water, breathing hard. Walter plunges under the water, shaking the drops vigorously from his head as he surfaces. He swims the final strokes, now in breaststroke, with relaxed energy. When he reaches up to the edge with a renewed certainty, he is the third swimmer in. Walter has let the race go.

Alongside cheers for the winner, are the home crowd's gasps of disappointment and defeat. They raise their hands in disbelief, some looking round to Gloria in consternation. Coach's face is stricken. Coach sits heavily, revealing Gloria to Walter. Eyes shining, she wraps her arms around herself.

LOUD SPEAKER
And the winnah is...

13 INT. WALTER'S SITTING ROOM, PRESENT DAY - NIGHT 13

Old Walter sits in his chair, eyes shining. He no longer wears hearing aids. Next to him is a small drinks table with his whiskey bottle and glass and the (now dog-eared) Johnny Weissmuller card. Walter's eyes well up as he signs over the loud speaker announcement:

WALTER
(signed throughout)
...Walter Kendall. Me. [BEAT] And
Gloria. My own sweet glory.

He places his fingertips on the card, then lifts his hand to sign.

WALTER (cont'd)
Your life's in the water, Coach'd
say. And he was right. But the
water flowed back home. Oh, to
flow. To swim. To sign. For the
love of it.

He places his hand flat on his chest. Walter laughs gently as he picks up his glass, glances at his whisky, looks 'heavenwards', and signs more certainly, raising his glass in salute.

WALTER (cont'd)
Water of life.

In his mind's eye, Walter is young again.

14 EXT. SWIMMING POOL, 1937 - DAY 14

The camera sweeps over the water to the pool end where Walter, assured and happy, stands with Gloria and between them, holding their hands, a 3-year old GIRL.

WALTER
(signed)
1, 2, 3.

Simultaneously the adults lift the child by the hands and all three leap outwards and splash down into the water.

MUSIC: The Swimming Song

END