

Docs: Jack and Harry 2. File: Anthony and Monica

## **ANTHONY AND MONICA**

**by Christopher Owen.**

### **CHARACTERS:**

**JACK** – any age from 60 years old.

**HARRY** - any age from 60 years old.

**SETTING:** A Pub. They are seated with a table between them.

\*\*\*\*\*

**JACK:** You all right, Harry?

**HARRY:** I have to say no better, no worse, thank you, Jack.

**JACK:** Harry's, he's got his bad knees, eh? Isn't that so, Harry?

**HARRY:** I got bad knees. No truer word.

**JACK:** Harry and me, we used to go to drink in the Queen's Arms, didn't we, eh?

**HARRY:** We used to drink in the Queen's Arms, eh?

JACK: I don't know if anyone here ever went to the Queen's Arms, Harry. We were going there when Peter was the landlord for – oh, I don't remember how many years. More or less the same crowd, the same regulars coming in.

HARRY: The Queen's Arms, it was home from home.

JACK: It was. It was. Then the brewery came in, eh? The brewery came in – refurbished it. They brought in the TV screen, the fruit machines, the loud music, the fancy décor – they bring in the young people with all their money to burn, eh, Harry? None of the old crowd go in there now. Unrecognizable.

HARRY: They've changed its name from the Queens Arms to The Frog and Fig Leaf.

JACK: (CORRECTING HIM): The Frog and the Fruit Fly.

HARRY: The Frog and the Fruit Fly.

### **THEY DRINK.**

JACK: We met up with a few people over the years there at the Queen's Arms, in the old days, some characters who came in there, when Peter was the landlord, eh?

HARRY: Yeah.

JACK: You remember Anthony and Monica, her and Anthony?

HARRY: That was tragic, that was.

JACK: What happened to that young woman, it was beyond belief.

HARRY: It was beyond human comprehension, Jack.

JACK: That's it, Harry. She was a lovely girl, she was.

HARRY: She'd have made some fella a very nice wife. Women, forget it, no good asking me, eh? - they're way outside of my understanding.

JACK: Monica, she was big boned young woman, wasn't she? Eh?  
There's no arguing with that.

HARRY: Jack and I reckon she was, when we first knew her, 10 ½ stone.

JACK: A comfortable type.

HARRY: Homely.

**THEY DRINK.**

HARRY: Her measurements at a rough estimate, they were Chest 40, regular arm, waist 36 – halve it, 18 – inside leg 30.

JACK: Well covered, one might say, eh, Harry?

HARRY: With regard to the aforesaid halving of the waist measurement, Jack Metclaf and I, Harry Kent here, each of us for over 20 years, were members of staff in the Gentlemen's Formal Wear Hire Department at Webber and Son, London's West End Branch. It was the custom at Webber and Son Formal Wear Hire for the gentleman's waist measurement to be halved. We'd take the gentleman's measurements. His waist, it was, say, 42, we'd halve it. We'd say to the gentleman "waist 21, sir, thank you, sir". Halving the waist measurement was understood as a show of respect toward the gentleman, wasn't it, Jack?

JACK: It was a tradition. It went all the way back to the founder, Lionel Webber, all the way back to 1904.

A BRIEF PAUSE WHILE THEY DRINK AND/OR MAKE THEMSELVES COMFORTABLE.

JACK: As we were saying, Monica, she used to come into the Queen's Arms – she was a big jolly girl, she was.

HARRY: She was full of the joys of her young life, Jack.

JACK: It was truly upsetting what happened to Anthony and Monica.

HARRY: No mistake. It was a tragedy.

JACK: Anthony, Anthony, he was an artiste – a conceptual artiste.

HARRY: Conceptual. He was making a name for himself even those days, wasn't he? Eh?

JACK: He was, Harry. He was in the running for the Turner, so we understood it, eh? He worked with tin cans, bits of stick.

HARRY: Anthony, he's the artiste who worked with the blue tac, that's him, isn't it?

JACK: No, no, not the blue tac, Harry. The artiste who worked with the blue tac, he was one of them who won the Turner, as I recall. The blue tac artiste, he was up there with the Gods in the world of the conceptual. The blue tac fella, he was in the premiership, so to speak, like Manchester United. Anthony, as I understand it, he was at most in the Championship, like Blackburn. Although he and Blackburn nowadays are on the up and up or so I am given to believe. Anthony, he was causing quite a stir among the conceptual art lovers worldwide with his tin cans and bits of string.

HARRY: None of that blue tac and that, then?

JACK: No, no, no. That was the other fella. No doubt, Anthony, he was kicking himself, him not thinking up the blue tac idea, but the other fella, he came up with it first. That's the idea in the world of the conceptual. It's him who comes up with something first that gets the prize. Got to be new, Harry. Blue tac one year, elephant shit the next. The lights going on and off the year after. What's it this year? Empty room, is it? Empty room, that's not be done before, see. It's a hard world, the world of the conceptual artiste, Harry. It's cut-throat.

HARRY: Every man and woman for him and herself, eh?

JACK: That's it. This Anthony, him working with tin cans, bits of stick, he came in the Queen's Arms those days from time to time.

HARRY: It was a tragedy what happened there.

JACK: That's it, Harry.

HARRY: Tell them.

JACK: What happened there, it was tragic. Anthony and his Monica, they were getting on like a house on fire, weren't they, and then, out of the blue, he ditched her. He said to her: "No more. Thanks for the memories. Off you go and shut the door behind you."

HARRY: He gave her the elbow, didn't he?

JACK: That's it. According to George's Charmain, Monica was devastated. Charmian and George, they'd come in, once, twice a week, before they'd go off for a hot Indian in the High Street.

HARRY: He'd look at her like he was all set to eat her, eh, Jack? She'd look back at him like she was saying, well, that's all right with me, George - you go ahead. They were very taken with each other, no mistake about that. Eh? Their cigarette stubs, his and Charmain's, all stubbed out, all mixed up together in the ashtray.

JACK: That's it.

**THEY DRINK.**

JACK: Monica, she reckoned her Anthony gave her her cards on account of her being, in her mind's eye, a large woman. She turned against herself, that's what Charmain told us. She came in the Queen's Arms one evening. Her hair, that used to be fair and down to her shoulders, she had had it cut short. It was no more than a quarter of an inch in length.

HARRY: She'd dye it black. Eh? It didn't look natural, did it, Jack? We say "Hello, you making some changes here, aren't you, Monica?" She says, 'What's that to do with you?' she says. 'Fuck off,' she says. Very snappy she was. She wasn't the same.

JACK: Charmain told us – this was later, eh?

HARRY: When it all comes out in the open, eh?

JACK: She told us that Monica, she gave up her job at the Halifax. She took on a part-time job with a firm of builders not far from where she lived. She went on a diet. She got herself down from ten and a half stone to eight - so Charmain told us.

HARRY: (TO JACK): You want a packet of crisps?

JACK: No.

HARRY: No. Jack sees her one day outside Marks and Spencers. She was as thin as a rake, wasn't she?

JACK: At a glance, from experience, one would say she was no longer the comely young woman she was, that's for sure. She was no longer chest 40, regular arm, waist 36 – halve it, 18 – inside leg 30.'

HARRY: She was no longer chest 40, regular arm, waist 36 – halve it, 18 – inside leg 30.

JACK: Out there, 'outside Marks and Spencers, in the brief moment I see her, I'd say she was chest 28, regular arm, waist 16-

HARRY: Halve it.

JACK: **8**.

HARRY: Waist **8**.

JACK: Her inside leg 30.

HARRY: 28, regular, 16 – halve it: **8** – 30. That wasn't a happy state of affairs. Not at all. Eh? Her arms were same length, weren't they, Jack? Like was her height. Head to toe, no alteration there. But, as Jack says, the chest, the waist, they were significantly diminished. And it didn't end there, did it?

JACK: No.

HARRY: No, it didn't. Women, eh? According to Charmain, Monica, she went on dieting more and more, didn't she?



HARRY: Her periods stopped.

JACK: So Charmain told us. No matter. She sticks to what she wants to do.

HARRY: It's all or nothing with Monica.

JACK: She's not the woman that she was before Anthony the conceptual artiste, him with his tin cans, and bits of stick, gave her the heave-ho. She gets herself down to seven stone. There was nothing to her.

HARRY: She was a bean pole, wasn't she?

JACK: That's it.

HARRY: She was a twig. She was a stick insect, Jack.

**THEY DRINK.**

JACK: Monica, she went out and bought herself a 'little black number', didn't she, Harry? - a tight-fitting black jacket - and a narrow ankle-length black skirt.

HARRY: A 'little back number'. She 'phoned the builders where she'd been working since she left the Halifax and told them she can't come in any more. She went to the doctor, asked him for a sick note. He told her she was underweight. He started asking his questions. She went home to her flat, locked the door. She doesn't answer the phone.

JACK: Charmain told us as how Monica, she's not eating - she goes down to 6 stone.

HARRY: Her measurements, a rough estimate, chest 22, regular arm, waist 14 – halve it, 7. Inside leg 30, like it was before.

JACK: She sits on a chair in her living room, doesn't she, Harry? She reduces her diet to a cup of tea and a dried biscuit a day.

HARRY: She was in fear of obesity - so Charmain let it be known. We learn all this from Charmain later, when it all comes out in the open.

JACK: That's it.

HARRY: Monica, she takes 'her little black number' – the jacket and skirt. She takes it in, doesn't she, Jack? – the chest and waist, the hips( and that). She stands before the mirror in her bedroom - she is not seeing herself as what anyone else in their right mind would be rightly seeing her - she was seeing herself as obese. She thinks God help us, look at those hips, look at those thighs.

JACK: Women, eh?

HARRY: She was overwhelmed by the enormity of her bones, she was. She was consumed with intent.

JACK: You can say that again.

HARRY: She was consumed with intent.

JACK: Charmain, she called on Anthony for Monica's mother's phone number. Monica's divorced mother lives in Malta. Charmian, she called on Anthony in his studio. Anthony put aside his tin cans, bits of stick. He finds the number on a board by the kitchen door. 'I'm phoning her mum,' Charmain tells him. 'She never goes out. No one ever sees her.' Charmain phoned Monica's mother. Her mother phoned Monica, but she got no answer. She wrote to her to tell her she was coming over. She took a taxi from the airport to Monica's flat.

HARRY: She rang the bell. No answer, eh?

JACK: She banged on the door – nothing. She and Charmain go to the police. The police break down the door. They find her, slumped in an armchair, an untouched cup of tea and a plain tea biscuit on the table at her side.

HARRY: She was dead. It was tragic. No other word for it.

JACK: Her little black number, the little black jacket, the black skirt, that she was wearing when they found her, we were told, it engulfed her.

HARRY: It swamped her.

### **THEY DRINK.**

JACK: They have the funeral wake at Charmain's, in her flat in Shepherd's Bush. Don't they, Harry? He was there – Anthony. He didn't stay long.

HARRY: No.

JACK: There were a lot of people come along. Harry and me, we were there. Monica's friends, they spoke of her as how, before she became ill, she was such a lively soul. They kept on saying she was so lively. Tragic.

HARRY: Some of them there at the wake, they blamed Anthony for what happened to her, to Monica, Jack. They said how he broke her heart.

HARRY: You want a packet of crisps?

JACK: No.

HARRY: No.

### **THEY DRINK.**

JACK: There was this woman at the wake who was very forthright about the whole business. You remember her, Harry? She said - didn't she? - how Monica's illness, as she spoke of it, was brought on as a consequence of the culture of male domination within society. She said Monica's death was a protest, wasn't it? - an expression of defiance, a call to all women to take up arms.

HARRY: I didn't care for her over much.

JACK: No.

HARRY: She kept looking at me, funny like, Jack. Like she had plans for me.

JACK: That's it.

HARRY: Plans that frankly I'd rather not be included in. I didn't like her. I could have done without her there.

JACK: That's it.

HARRY: Monica's mother, she says to me as how she couldn't believe her daughter could have done what she did. There was another woman there, Jack – eh? - not the woman who looked at me like she had plans - but another one who could have been a friend of hers. She declared she blamed Monica's psychological deterioration on the media and fashion industry. This gave rise, didn't it, Jack, as we remember, to a discussion about Monica and her demise as related to the burgeoning billion dollar diet industry. If I recall rightly, someone else started on about the decline of religious education in our schools. And the loss of social coherence and the sense of community and that.

JACK: It was all very high powered, it was.

### **THEY DRINK.**

JACK: It was sometime after the funeral – some weeks, as I recall – one of Charmain's friends told Harry, who she met outside ASDA where she'd been to do her weekend shopping, as how she, Charmain, and Monica's Anthony had taken up with each other.

HARRY: Charmain had moved in with him, eh? She'd moved in with Anthony.

JACK: Charmain told Harry and me as how, she now being, as she referred to herself, Anthony's bitch –

HARRY: She was Anthony's bitch. She was Anthony's bitch.

JACK: - it was possible, if not more than likely, she'd become immortalized.

HARRY: A celebrity in her own right, Jack.

JACK: That's it, Harry. Just so. She says to Harry and me, Anthony, the artiste, him doing all right, it was on the cards that in time he'd become famous.

HARRY: Like the fella with the blue tac.

JACK: That's it, Harry.

HARRY: Charmain, in the course of time, may find herself hanged in the Tate Gallery.

JACK: As we understand it: Anthony, he asked Monica's mother before she sailed back to Malta if he could have Monica's 'little black number' – the little black jacket and skirt that she died in. Her mother, she sees no reason why he can't have it.

HARRY: It was no use to her any more.

JACK: He takes the outfit back to his studio –

HARRY: This were according to Charmain –

JACK: Yes. He takes the outfit – rough estimate: chest 23, regular arm, waist 14 – halve it, 7 - inside leg 28 –

HARRY: Chest 23, regular arm, waist 14 – halve it, 7 - inside leg 28 –

JACK: - he cuts away the lapels, the sleeves, the cuffs, the length of material from the collar to the waist. He cuts up the skirt. He arranges the pieces separately, then he glues them with his tin cans and his bits of stick to the hardboard backing. Not as they have been, but different, in a new way. A lapel here, a sleeve there, tin cans, bits of stick here and thereabouts.

HARRY: It was a montage.

JACK: He's had it exhibited in a gallery south of the river.

HARRY: He calls it "Sunrise Over Shepherds Bush Green".

JACK: So we hear: he's put it in for the Turner prize. Eh?

**THEY DRINK.**

JACK: It was tragic that.

HARRY: Tragic. I don't begin to understand women, Jack.

JACK: No. (RE: BEER): Another one?

HARRY: Won't say no. (HE BEGINS TO RISE) Have a quick ciggy out there in the open.

JACK: Right. That's it. While you're having a ciggie, I'll have a quick slash.

HARRY: Back in 15 minutes, then.

JACK: Give me 20.

HARRY: Having trouble getting started, are you?

JACK: That's it.

THEY PREPARE TO LEAVE THE BAR.

HARRY: You remember the songs we used to sing, Queen's Arms?

JACK: The songs – that's it.

HARRY: When You're Smiling, was one of them. Eh?

(SINGS): 'When you're smiling.. (JACK JOINS IN.)



THEY MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE EXIT.

HARRY: 20 minutes, then.

JACK: Make it 25.

THEY EXIT.

**END.**