

PETER AND TINA

By Christopher Owen

CHARACTERS: JACK AND HARRY VERY ELDERLY SIDE BY SIDE IN A PUB.

JACK: You all right, Harry?

HARRY: Same as ever, Jack. (TO THE AUDIENCE): I've got the bad knees – the knees.

JACK: That's it, Harry. He's got bad knees.

HARRY: Jack here, he has trouble, don't you, Jack? – down in the waterworks.

JACK: A bit of trouble one has to confess. We won't dwell on it, on the waterworks, I think, shall we, eh, Harry?

HARRY: No. We won't dwell on Jack's waterworks. We don't want to do that, do we, eh?

JACK: That's it. Harry and me, we used to drink in the Queen's Arms, didn't we? Eh? We'd drink in there – oh, I don't know how many years it was, eh?

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

JACK: That's it.

HARRY: Then the brewery moves in – they bring in the TV screen, the fruit machines, loud music, bring in the young people with all the money to burn, eh, Jack? They came in, did it up to attract the young. Made a dog's dinner of it. Tarted it up. Buggered it up, the more like.

JACK: That's it, that's it, Harry. You tell them.

HARRY: None of the old crowd go in there now. They changed its name from the Queen's Arms to the Frog and the Fig Leaf.

JACK: The Frog and The Fruit Fly.

HARRY: The Frog and The Fruit Fly.

JACK: It was tragic what happened to the Queen's Arms, to Peter the landlord, to his wife – his wife Tina, eh, Harry?

HARRY: It was a tragedy. It was beyond human comprehension, Jack, eh?

JACK: Peter's wife, Tina, she wouldn't go out, leave the flat upstairs - that was the problem.

HARRY: She wouldn't go out shopping, wouldn't go out anywhere or anything, eh, Jack?

JACK: Tina, as we understand it from Peter, she arrived over here, in Great Britain, from Poland. Tina, it wasn't her real name, was it, Harry? It was something like Tineska - but Peter calls her Tina. It was easier than Tineska. Eh?

HARRY: When she first arrived over here she didn't have any more than half a dozen words of English, did she, Jack?

JACK: No, she didn't. She came over here on account of her not getting on with her family back in Poland, so we understand it. The long and short of it is, as Peter told us, she turned up one day at the Queen's Arms. She was looking for a job. Peter, he needed someone to do the lunches, the snacks. He took her on.

HARRY: He took her on. He gave her a chance.

JACK: And it's not long before the two of them, they got married. Eh? She moved in upstairs. She kept the flat up there spic and span. She did the lunches, the snacks.

HARRY: Peter's Tina, she made the best shepherd's pie in all of London, that's what we used to say, eh? Her spaghetti Bolognese wasn't up to much, but her shepherd's pie and her red bean lasagne were exceptionally palatable.

JACK: Right. Tina, she was upstairs in the flat - you remember, Harry? - eleven, half eleven of an evening - most evenings - we're in the bar - she'd start to play her music - her CDs, tapes, whatever. We'd hear it

coming down from up there - songs from the shows. 'Don't Cry For Me, Argentina', 'The Hills Are Alive With The Sound of Music'.

HARRY: It was a signal, wasn't it?

JACK: It was her way of telling Peter she wants him to close up for the night, to come up to her, have a spot to eat, and so forth. She'd put on 'Don't Cry For Me, Argentina,' 'The Hills Are Alive With The Sound Of Music'. Tina, her and Peter, to all intent and purposes, they were as happy as Larry. No doubt about it.

HARRY: That's it.

JACK: Only, not long after they got married and she moved in to the flat upstairs, up above the bar, she didn't want to go out - not ever again. She wouldn't leave the premises. Peter, he tried to persuade her, but she wouldn't budge on the issue. She was adamant. She put her foot down. Peter, he said, 'Well, alright, sweetie pie, no one's forcing you,' he said, 'No harm done,' he said, 'You don't want to go out, it's up to you,' he told hers. So she stayed upstairs, didn't she?

HARRY: Tina, she'd not go out.

JACK: It was three, four, years, wasn't it, Harry? And she'd not had no fresh air, nor no sunlight, not for three, four years.

THEY DRINK.

JACK: We're in the bar, Queen's Arms, ten, ten thirty of an evening – Friday evening – Tina, her in the bath upstairs, in the flat upstairs, her and the bath come through the ceiling down into the gent's toilet in the bar. That's right, isn't it?

HARRY: Jack, he comes out of the gent's toilet only seconds before Tina comes down into it, doesn't he? Jack comes out, and we hear this crash from inside the gents.

JACK: Harry and me, the lot of us in the Queen's Arms that evening, we hurry over to see what's up. We open the gents' toilet door, there she is, there's Tina, in the bath - naked.

HARRY: Tina, she's 22 stone.

JACK: She is.

HARRY: Her measurements, at an estimate, her lying there in the bath, they were: chest 48 – double D cup or possibly G – regular arm - waist 50 – halve it, 25 – inside leg 32.

JACK: That's it, Harry.

HARRY: With regard to the aforesaid halving of the waist measurements, Jack Metcalf and I, Harry Kent here, we worked in the Gentlemen's Formal Wear Hire Department at Webber and Son, London's West End Branch for a total of 63 years – Jack: 32, me: 31.

JACK: You tell them, Harry.

HARRY: That's it. It was the custom, Webber and Son formal wear hire department for the waist measurement to be halved. Eh? We'd take the gentleman's measurements. His waist, it was, say – (THINKS) –

JACK: (INSTANTLY): 42.

HARRY: 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 to the gentlemen. (JACK SPEAKING THE NEXT

SENTENCE BELOW HARRY): A courtesy. It was a tradition, Jack.

(JACK SPEAKING THE NEXT TWO SENTENCES BELOW

HARRY): It went all the way back to the founder, Lionel Webber. All the way back to 1904. That's it. At a glance, rough estimate, no more, Peter's wife Tina's measurements, they were: chest: 50. Double D cup -

JACK: - Double D cup.

HARRY: – it could be a G, Jack.

JACK: It could be, Harry. Could be a G.

HARRY: It could be a G – if there is a G.

JACK: That's it. As Harry say – if there is a G, it could be a G.

HARRY: Tina, she's 22 stone. Chest 50 – cup Double D stroke G – the cup not being a thing Jack and I have the appropriate professional expertise by what to make an accurate estimate – Jack and I being in the

gentlemen's formal wear hire, us not having no experience of a ladies' formal wear, you understand –

JACK: Nevertheless –

HARRY: - Nevertheless, Tina's chest: 50 - her cup Double D or G -

JACK: - Allegedly -

HARRY: - Allegedly. Her cup, however you look at it, substantial –

JACK: - substantial –

HARRY: Tina: her chest 50 – the cup –

BOTH: - as aforesaid –

HARRY: - her length of arm regular, the waist 50 – halve it: 25. Inside leg -

JACK: - at a guess –

HARRY: - 32.

JACK: She was big.

THEY DRINK.

JACK: It was that night she came through in the bath, Peter, he told us about Tina not ever leaving the flat upstairs in all of three years. Apart from not going out, Peter, he didn't have any complaints about Tina, did he?

HARRY: He didn't have any complaints about Tina. She was a lovely cook, Jack, eh? She upstairs, she played her CDs: Don't Cry For Me, Argentina, The Hills Are Alive With the Sound of Music.

JACK: That's it, Harry.

HARRY: Peter and Tina, they bath together. That wasn't to be sniffed at, eh, Jack?

JACK: Peter didn't object to Tina and him in the bath above the gents, no mistake.

HARRY: She soaped him. Eh, Jack? Her, all 22 stone, chest 48, cup double D stroke G, regular arm, waist 50 – halve it, 25 – inside leg 32. Her and a bar of soap, Peter, he was in paradise. That's what I reckon. How they both got into that bath together is another matter. But, apparently, so he told us, they did. In consequence of which, Peter, he was delirious.

JACK: On the other hand, Harry, as he gave us to understand, it wasn't all fun and games. Eh? No. It wasn't without its dangers - you recall him telling us, eh? - them bathing together, it nearly finished him off. Eh?

HARRY: It nearly damn well killed the bugger.

JACK: He told us. They're in the bath, the two of them, she's soaping him – God help us – she's kneeling over him - in that bath – she's kneeling over him, him underneath her - she slips, falls onto him, she can't get up, stuck – 22 stone.

HARRY: Chest: 48 – cup Double D stroke G - regular arm - waist: 50 – halve it: 25 - inside leg: 32.

JACK: It's a narrow bath – she can't budge herself - him, Peter, under the water, his head under the water, he's bloody drowning. Isn't he? He's struggling, fighting to get up out of there, push her off, but she's not budging. Eh? She damn well near killed him.

HARRY: She damn well near killed him.

JACK: That's it.

HARRY: From what he told us, he had to give her a sharp hard knee to her privates. Eh? That so, eh, Jack?

JACK: Had to give her a number of blows to her head.

HARRY: Damn well near drowned him, she did.

JACK: What got Peter in the end about Tina not going out ever, what made him decide he'd got to do something, was after he heard on the tele about a woman somewhere who wouldn't go out, couldn't go out, and

there was this fire in her house and she was burned alive. That was what got Peter thinking enough's enough. He read this book, he told us. Book on agoraphobia. Entitled 'Behavioural Modifications.' A step by step carrot and stick technique. One step of progress, so to speak, you get a carrot. Decline to take that step, don't do it, and the possibility of a carrot is withdrawn – which, as I seem to remember, is the stick. Eh, Harry?

HARRY: It's the stick.

JACK: Peter, he took the bull by the horns. The night Tina and the bath came through the ceiling of the gents' toilet, he said to her, 'That's it, Tina, sweetie-pie - you get yourself outside that front door or you're not having any more gin,' he said.

HARRY: Tina liked her gin, make no mistake, didn't she, Jack?

JACK: Peter, he took the bottle she had with her upstairs, he emptied it down the sink.

HARRY: He meant the business, didn't he, eh?

JACK: He did. He said to her, to Tina 'Now then, you want a gin, sweetie pie, you've got to come down to the front door. You take two steps out of that front door, out on the path outside, and I'll give you a bottle of gin,' he said. She said, 'I'm not going outside, teddy bear,' she said.

HARRY: He said, 'Right-oh then, sweetie pie, no gin.'

JACK: It hurt him to say that.

HARRY: He made that quite clear, didn't he, Jack?

JACK: Tina, two, three days later, she's in urgent need of her gin rations, isn't she, eh, Harry? She says to Peter if he promises to give her a bottle of gin, she'll have a go - two steps out of the front door onto the path outside.

HARRY: She has a go, doesn't she?

JACK: She stands at the top of the stairs, in her pink summer dress.

HARRY: He opens the front door.

JACK: He opens the front door. He calls to her, 'Two steps out, front door, you get a bottle of gin,' he calls. Down them stairs she comes. Her all 22 stone. She's terrified. She's coming down those stairs, she's got her eyes shut. He shouts: 'Open your eyes, woman. You'll fucking fall, you silly bitch, you have your eyes closed,' he calls.

HARRY: He's calling, 'Come on, Tina baby,' he's calling.

JACK: She is coming down those stairs and Peter, he's thinking God help him, she'll never make it, she's gonna come a cropper.

HARRY: She calls out, 'I can't do it, teddy bear, don't make me go, teddy bear.' She's crying and shouting, 'Give me the gin, teddy bear, give me the gin.'

JACK: Peter, he's backing out of the front door. 'Come on, baby,' he's shouting at her, and he's thinking God help us, I hope the neighbours aren't looking out of their windows. She's down on her knees out there on the front path.

HARRY: She's crying out, 'Don't make me go, teddy bear, don't make me do it.'

JACK: 'On your feet,' he's telling her, 'Get on your feet,' he's shouting.

HARRY: The neighbours, they're hanging out of their windows. Men, women and children. They're calling out, 'What the fuck's going on down there?'

JACK: Tina, she's on her feet, and Peter, he's cheering her on.

HARRY: He's cheering her on –

JACK: He's cheering her on – and she's done it!

HARRY: And she's done it!

JACK: She's done the two steps out along the path. She grabs the bottle off Peter and takes herself back up to the flat upstairs.

HARRY: Peter, he's out there on the front path dancing for joy, eh? And the neighbours and passersby, they're throwing things at him, eh? Old shoes.

JACK: 32 inch Panasonic television.

HARRY: Eggs, tin of beans - like it was Harvest Festival.

JACK: 'She's done it,' he shouts out to them. That was step one.

HARRY: The carrot and the stick.

JACK: The book: Behavioural Modifications. Tina, she did it two or three more times, as we understand it, eh? – two steps out, then next time another two steps, and so on.

HARRY: That's it.

JACK: Then she said to him she's not doing it, not going outside any more. Never again, she told him. He said, 'Right, no more gin, sweetie pie.'

HARRY: She said, 'Right, no more soaping, teddy bear.' Eh?

JACK: He wasn't happy about that, not one bit of it. He relied heavy on the soaping, so we understand.

HARRY: It was an integral part of his life, wasn't it, Jack? Soaping was comforting and arousing and, Jack and me, we reckon soaping, it led to other intimacies, which we don't have any need to go into.

JACK: Soaping was just the start of it.

HARRY: As one might say - no soaping: Peter's life, it became a stony ground.

THEY DRINK.

JACK: A couple of days later, Peter, he went upstairs after closing up the pub for the afternoon, Tina, she was in the bedroom, standing by the bedroom window. She was wearing her pink summer dress and a blue hat.

HARRY: She had her handbag over her arm.

JACK: She'd got into the store room and helped herself to a couple of bottles of the Gordons, and, to put no finer point on it, she was plastered, eh?

HARRY: She was a danger to shipping.

JACK: That's it. She was talking Polish at him, wasn't she? So Peter told us. She walked towards him, she was three sheets and more to the wind, she was swaying all over, she started shouting at him, in Polish. He told her, he said, 'It's no good you going on like you are, talking the Polish, cos I can't bleeding understand, can I? Cos I don't speak it. Speak bleeding English,' he told her, didn't he, Harry? 'Calm down, speak English or I'll hit you,' he said to her. And he hit her.

HARRY: He had to.

JACK: Across her face, so as to startle her, to bring her to her senses. It did the trick – that’s for sure. It pulled her up, she stopped her Polish nonsense, she spoke English again.

BRIEF PAUSE.

JACK: Peter was down in the bar, he was closing up for the afternoon, he turned round, he saw Tina standing there at the back of the bar, all done up in her nice blue coat and blue hat and her handbag. ‘I’m going out. Onto the pavement,’ she said. He said to her, ‘You don’t want to rush things. You don’t want to overdo it, sweetie pie’.

HARRY: He said, ‘Steady as she goes, sweetie pie. One step at a time,’ he said.

JACK: He reckoned he knew what was best for her, didn’t he?

HARRY: He was her coach. It was the carrots and the sticks technique, wasn’t it? The book he read. Eh?

JACK: She says to him, ‘I got to try it on my own, teddy bear. Without the Gordon’s.’

HARRY: ‘Come along then, baby’ he says, ‘let’s see how you get on,’ he says.

JACK: They’re out in the hallway, she says to him, ‘Watch me from the bedroom window, teddy bear. I’ve got to try it by myself.’

HARRY: He isn't at all sure about that one, her doing it on her own.

JACK: But she insists, doesn't she? So he says, ok. And he goes up to the bedroom like she tells him to.

HARRY: He watches her from the bedroom window, doesn't he?

JACK: That's it, Harry. And there she is, out on the front path. Cool as a cucumber.

HARRY: She's wearing her summer dress, her blue hat and coat – and she's got her handbag.

JACK: That's it, she's got her handbag. There she is, she's walking down the path, very slowly and concentrated. And Peter, he thinks, 'here's a turn up for the books'. He tries to get the window open so as to call down to her, but it's stuck.

HARRY: The paint where he one time painted the window, it's stuck - he can't get the bloody thing open.

JACK: She gets the front gate open, and she's walking out onto the pavement outside.

HARRY: Peter, he's banging away on the window pane. He's trying to get her attention, isn't he?

JACK: He's trying to get her to look up at him at the bedroom window. He sees her stepping out on to the pavement outside in the street. She doesn't seem to hear him banging at the window, for God's sake. She's not looking up at him, him in the window. He runs down those stairs, and he's out of the front door, but she's not there.

HARRY: She's not there.

JACK: No. He runs down to the gate. He's out on the pavement. He looks up and down the road. He runs up to the corner. He looks up the next road. He looks up and there she is.

HARRY: She's getting on the bus.

JACK: She is.

HARRY: She'd not been outside in the open air for all of three years, and there she was, getting on the 259.

JACK: He called out to her, 'Baby, baby, come back here, sweetie pie.' She didn't look round or anything, does she?

HARRY: She was on that bus.

JACK: You can imagine how he felt. The bloody woman had gone mad. He was gob smacked.

HARRY: Three years inside and suddenly she was driving off inside the 259.

JACK: He gets his car, but he couldn't find her anywhere.

HARRY: He phoned the police. Missing persons.

JACK: Put yourself in his place.

HARRY: Put yourself in his place.

JACK: He was going spare, wasn't he? He got a phone call. It was her brother. In Poland. The brother said she'd gone back home. Tina was sorry, but she wasn't coming back.

HARRY: That's it, Jack. All those years she was with Peter she wouldn't go outside – she went outside, caught the 259, she didn't come back inside.

JACK: That's it, Harry.

THEY DRINK.

JACK: It was tragic what happened there. Harry, me, the next evening we're on our way over to the Queen's Arms, everywhere we look, on the pavements, the roads, on garden walls, up the side of the buildings, there for all the world to witness, sprayed in red paint: 'Teddy Bear Loves Sweetie Pie'. We're outside the Queen's Arms, all over the front of the pub, on the walls, the windows, the front door, the pavement outside, sprayed in red: 'Teddy Bear Loves Sweetie Pie'. The place shut up. No lights on. We look through the window, same thing:

BOTH: 'Teddy Bear Loves Sweetie Pie'.

JACK: It's on the ceiling, on the walls, the bar counter, all across the mirrors. It's sprayed in red on the tables and on the carpet.

HARRY: Peter, he'd lost his marbles.

JACK: The brewery comes in, takes over. The place refurbished.

HARRY: They tart it up, new carpets, new bar, they bring in the music, eh, Jack? - the television, the big screen.

JACK: The fruit machines – the fruit machines flashing never ending.

HARRY: They're after the youth. The youth, they drink more.

JACK: There's more money in the youth, make no mistake. (AFTER A MOMENT): None of us go there now.

HARRY: No. There's no more of Tina's shepherd's pie, her playing her CD's in the flat up there when she wants Peter to close up in the bar for the night, when she want him upstairs. There's no more of her songs from the shows coming down into the bar as it was. No more 'Don't Cry For Me, Argentina'.

JACK: No more 'The Hills Are Alive With the Sound of Music', Harry.

HARRY: Not now, no.

A BRIEF PAUSE.

JACK: Time to go.

HARRY: Right-oh.

JACK: Have a quick slash first.

HARRY: I'll have a quick ciggy out there while I wait for you, eh?

JACK: Right. That's it.

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 in the 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.)

When you're smiling

The whole world smiles with you

When you're laughing

When you're laughing

The sun comes shining thru

But when you're crying

You bring on the rain

So stop your sighing be happy again

JACK: Talking of rain, Harry – got to go – can't wait.

THEY MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE EXIT.

HARRY: 20 minutes, then.

JACK: Make it 25.

THEY EXIT.

END OF PETER AND TINA.