

# A walk down the Aisle

Words by **JACKIE BUXTON**



**I**saac looked at his watch again: 2.27 pm. Twenty seven minutes ago Monika was supposed to not arrive. He didn't know what was worse: being ordered to undergo a fifth rehearsal of Jerusalem or the unnatural silence which hung between this end of the church and the other; a silence smattered only with whispers or broken occasionally by the creak of a heavy head falling asleep against the back of the pew in front. He loosened his cravat again. It was hot. His neck sported more droplets of water than a windscreen in an English summer.

And did those feet in ancient time  
Walk upon England's mountain green?  
At least he'd never struggle to

find the words in future, even if every time he sang them he'd be reminded of this nauseating feeling. He coughed. The enormous vicar, facing him and the congregation, raised an eyebrow, dipped his head and added a little 'ahem' of his own.

To his left Marek joined in with the throat-clearing before asserting with his clip-clop Eastern European version of English, that Isaac had better get used to it, mate,

"Monika, she will be keeping you waiting for the rest of your life!"

Isaac gave him a pat on the back, he was fidgeting even more than he was.

Should he have told him his concerns? Marek was his best man, after all, and had been his first real friend here in Southampton. He'd only been in England six months himself when Isaac moved from Burnley and still Marek lent him the money for the deposit on his poky, rented flat. And, of course, he'd introduced him to Monika, the beautiful brunette from the Ukraine — the woman he was to marry, just as soon as she turned up.

It had been what his mother described, with an elongated closing of the eyelids, as a 'whirlwind romance'. But what did she know about romance? She was married to his dad.

Bring me my arrows of desire!  
Perhaps Monika had come a little quickly after Kara. Granted, Kara was the only other woman he'd ever really loved and he had met Monika only six days after they'd split.

But who plans these things?  
Perhaps he'd always question whether it was wrong to end it with Kara, wonder if it was unfair of him to find it difficult to be with someone whose concept of

sweet nothings was to discuss the amount of calories in meringue and whose idea of a Saturday night in was a diet lemonade and a single chocolate caramel, made to last interminably. Worse! When the last strings of the caramel had finally slipped down Kara's throat, her eyes would dart to the remaining chocolates for the rest of the evening like a fly on patrol. Once, he'd picked up the bag and tipped the remainder into her mouth. It had taken her two days to start speaking to him again and only then because she couldn't expect him to understand what it was like to be a woman. He'd retorted that being a bloke was certainly preferable if it meant you could eat a chocolate in less than thirty minutes.

I will not cease from mental fight.

But Kara was kind, she was sweet and she'd been his soul mate. And she had legs up to her armpits and a smile which took up half her face. Then there was that laugh with her head tossed so far back it could win a yoga competition.

He was struggling to forget the way she laughed.

The vicar held up his hands. "Let the service commence," he boomed.

"Thank the lord," Marek said, now sweating so obviously in his ill-fitting mourning suit, Isaac would be relieved when he had to move aside.

There was a clatter as the immense wooden doors opened behind him and the entire audience twisted to get the first glimpse of Monika starting her walk down the aisle. Isaac's head spun back to the front.

Here comes the bride  
Dressed all in light

It was Monika who'd insisted he didn't watch her walk towards him so he focused on the gasps of the congregation the, 'oh, my's' of ageing relatives and the almost painful sobs of his mother.

Love have they waited  
Long have they planned

He could hear the tip-tap of Monika's footsteps now, in those much vaunted six inch heels to bring her up to five foot five and the weight of the occasion. Should he turn round?

"Don't let me look, Marek," he said, as much to calm his friend's

nerves whose face had developed a pink hue. "Don't want to spoil the moment."

"Too late, mate, she is here," Marek squeaked, "Time for me to be leaving you."

Her father peeled off and Monika slipped in-between Isaac and Marek.

"Hello you," she said, pressing a note into Isaac's palm. "If you love me, you no read it now," she said, "lady says she make fuss if I no give it to you now." She raised her other hand and gave Marek a shy wave.

Isaac darted a look behind him and then back to the note but before he could mouth some confused obscenity, Monika said, "I explain you later." Her eyes were wide, her eyelashes long and curled but the sparkle he'd come to expect was missing. "My brain is so messy with this," she said.

Isaac studied her now, her lips a glossy pink, quivering as she maintained her gaze straight ahead. A small tear landed on her cheek. He wanted to put an arm around her shoulder but left it at his side.

The vicar raised the worn leather book to face height, held it at arm's length, balanced in the crook of his arm. "OK both?" he said, looking rapidly from Monika to Isaac and back again until anxiously taking their silence as an affirmative.

"I call upon these persons here present..."

Isaac fondled the paper in his hand. When was he supposed to read it? He wiped his forehead with the back of the other. It might be nothing more than a good luck wish! He turned his face to Monika's.

"Any lawful impediment..."

Her eyes were fixed on Marek. Isaac remembered the stag night, how Marek had done his homework into Monika's background and the boys had been impressed, even if Isaac hadn't cared for their innuendo. It was embarrassing when his friend knew more about his fiancée's upbringing than he did.

"Or forever hold thy peace."

He'd only known Monika for three months, it was true. But they had the rest of their lives to get to know each other better.

"Good," the vicar said, his ruddy cheeks returning to the greyish-white of someone who

didn't get excited very often.

"Just a moment," Isaac said, raising one hand in a 'stop' sign. He uncurled the letter. Some of the words had faded in his sweaty palm but still the sentences hit him in the stomach.

Nobody spoke, nobody breathed.

He read it again, then flattened the paper against his trousers, folded it into quarters and put it into his pocket. He took two steps over to Marek, cupped his hand around his ear, whispered some gibberish and turned on his heel. Then he pulled down his suit tails before jabbing an elbow backwards into Marek's stomach.

"Issie?" Isaac heard his mother say. He couldn't look at her, his eyes searching the back of the church instead.

"I'm so sorry," Isaac repeated as he stumbled down the aisle with Monika close behind him, tripping along on her clackety heels. Faces lurched forwards and sideways. 'Mistakes,' he heard, and, 'You can get insurance you know, nowadays.'

Out of the kerfuffle came Kara's face, a little plumper than he remembered, pink and concerned, golden hair bouncing around it. He walked faster now, her face as his target, pushing people's arms out of the way with his own, issuing apologies and instructions to nonetheless enjoy the party but he would be giving it a miss.

Never had he yearned more for a sugar-less drink and a single sweet.

"I had to tell you, didn't I?" Kara said when he finally got close enough to hear her. "I couldn't let you be part of a green card scam?" She shot a glance in Monika's direction. Isaac turned to see her, now within two people of him and Kara. She'd removed her shoes and was waving them in the air in an attempt at a protest but was struggling to make any impact with her lack of height. When she cracked the back of the head of the man in front with the point of one of the stiletto heels, Isaac grabbed them from her and hurled them into the font.

He turned back to Kara, reached his arms around her waist, his hands sitting on her hips.

"I was just jealous at first," she

said, "I wanted to know more about the woman I thought you'd found on the re-bound." He pulled her into his chest, nestled his fingers in her soft hair, his nose on her neck, remembering her smell.

"And that's when I found the connection and realised you were part of Marek's plan."

"I'm such a fool," he mumbled.

"I think she loved you in a way," she said, "but she loved Marek more."

Isaac's tears fell onto his starched collars. His mother had always said he'd cry on his wedding day. "It's OK," he said, finally pulling himself to arm's length, "because I love you more, Kara."

A communal gasp left the mouths of the gathering around the couple. A hand lodged itself over Monika's mouth.

"Hey," Kara wiped Isaac's tears with one hand and held up a bag of caramels with the other. "Share?" she asked. "Although you do owe me a few."



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