

Baltic bride

‘Good day, mate’. That’s Australian for ‘Dzien Dobry’. My name is Claudia Gabowska. I live in Australia now but I am originally from Kraków in Poland. How did I get to the other side of the world? Well, let me tell you my story.

I was born in Nowy Targ but I moved to Kraków when I was 18 years old to take up a job as a secretary in a large legal business. I would have liked to attend university but my parents just couldn’t afford to send me there.



I remember the big move to Kraków. I was so excited, with high hopes of a career and the prospect of meeting Mr Right. The job was OK I suppose, somewhat boring but at least it paid the bills. There were handsome lawyers working there and I was often asked out for dates. I also joined a few social clubs and met various men but nothing seemed to work out in the romance department. Time passed quickly and before

long I found myself aged 30, single and still in the same job. I always seemed to be overlooked for promotion because I didn’t have any tertiary law qualifications. I did study English and German at night school for a few years but the panel didn’t seem to take this into account when I went for interviews.

One day I met my friend Agnieszka for coffee during the lunch break. She was an architect on a good salary and was always smartly dressed. I liked meeting Agnieszka because she would listen when I wanted to discuss my troubles. ‘I won’t bother her with my problems today’, I decided, so I asked what she would be doing on the weekend. ‘Roman and I are flying to the Paris’, she said. I felt a pang of sadness. ‘You are so lucky to have a husband and to be able to afford to travel’, I said, ‘I feel so lonely on weekends. And I have never been out of Poland’.

‘Claudia, its time you did something with your life. You can’t remain sad and lonely here in Kraków. You know, the other day I saw an advertisement in a magazine. It was placed by an introduction agency in Australia. They have Australian men who are looking for wives. The agency is called Ocean Brides or something like that. No, wait now I remember, it is Baltic Brides. They have agents in Gdansk, Stockholm and Helsinki.’



I was a bit annoyed that she would even suggest an introduction agency.

‘Aren’t agencies for the desperate and dateless’, I said. ‘Besides, Australia is on the other side of the world and I ... Agnieszka interrupted me. ‘Well, you haven’t had any luck here in Poland. Why don’t you give it a try?’

I changed the subject and forgot all about the conversation. Then about a month later I had the flu

and went to the doctor to get a certificate for work. In the waiting room I picked up a magazine. Suddenly something sprang out from all the text on the page. There it was in black and white - the advertisement placed by Baltic Brides. I tore out the advertisement when no one was looking and placed it in my handbag. For the next few days I was a nervous wreck. Should I contact them?

Finally I worked up a enough courage and sent an email to the agent in Gdansk. The next day there was a reply. I was hesitant to open the email. ‘Am I doing the right thing’, I thought. Finally I opened it. There was a pleasant spiel from the agent welcoming my enquiry and advising that they had a number of single men in Australia on their books. There were ten photographs of men attached I looked at each of them but none were particularly interesting.

The email contained a contact number for the agent in Gdansk so I decided to ring. A woman called Ewa answered. She was quite friendly and asked if I had looked at the photographs. ‘There is no one that appeals to me’, I said. ‘What about Andrew?’ said Ewa. ‘He is about 35 and is in steady employment’.

‘Well maybe but I have heard that agencies have high introduction fees. How much will I have to pay for an introduction.’

Ewa laughed. ‘Absolutely nothing’, she said, ‘The man pays the fee, not the women’.

Ewa was quite persuasive and before I had time to think about the pro and cons of introductions, I found myself communicating with Andrew by email and telephone. My English was not the best but I found out that he worked on a large cattle farm in a part of Australia called the Northern Territory. Andrew seemed very interested in me, particularly when I sent my photograph. After only a fortnight he asked if I would visit him in Australia, with all expenses being covered by him. This came as a shock. Everything seemed to be happening so quickly. It was like a dream where events occur in fast motion.



Looking back now, the next few weeks after Andrew's invitation seem like a blur, so unreal. I didn't have time to think rationally. I remember talking to Agnieszka. 'You don't want to be left on the shelf, do you', she told me. Ewa was ringing every day from Gdansk to encourage me to go to Australia. There were constant emails from Andrew, begging me to accept his invitation. Through the haze I remember sitting in

the boss's office, requesting leave so that I could 'visit a relative in Germany'. Suddenly I found myself at the airport at Kraków, changing planes at Helsinki, then again at Bangkok and landing in Darwin. Was this really happening to me?

Andrew was not able to meet me in Darwin. Apparently the foreman on the cattle station wanted him to participate in the annual cattle muster and at that stage Andrew still hadn't worked up enough courage to reveal that he had requested a mail order bride. However, Andrew had arranged for me to travel by bus to Tennant Creek, the nearest town to the cattle station. The plane touched down. I walked down the steps and stood on the tarmac of Darwin airport. I was all alone, on the other side of the world, in a strange country.

End of part 1

Bill Bloomfield