

## Husband out of a Casting

### **Dark hair. Blue eyes. Slim. Attractive. Iwona Majdan, Artist from Canada. Organized castings, in search of a husband. I signed up.**

Translation: Iwona Majdan

A small pub in Krakow. Five TV cameras, several photographers, a crowd of reporters. There are five of us, those interested to take part. The cigarette smoke is forming in clouds around the bright reflectors. I have the feeling that I'm in a theatre.

#### *The search for a husband*

Iwona announced on the net ([www.spam.art.pl/theloveproject](http://www.spam.art.pl/theloveproject)) that she's looking for a husband. She informs us that this is an artistic action but also a serious proposition of love. "To tell you the truth, I fear commitment like I fear a vicious dog - writes Iwona on her website - But soon I'll be turning thirty and I guess it's about time that I settled down (at least that's what my family thinks)". The winner will receive a ticket to Canada and will be introduced the parents of his bride to be. Men have an opportunity to charm Iwona not only over the internet but also in person, at one of the castings held in Wroclaw, Krakow and Poznan. "Women continue to be ostracized when they don't fit certain stereotypes, of the devoted wife, and loving mother - comments the philosopher Magdalena Sroda - In bigger cities, where women have careers, but most of all, are becoming independent, this is changing: now women are beginning to demand more of their partners or they simply choose to remain alone. They want from life what men have always had".

The Miss Poland competition or the wet t-shirt contests are a norm. It doesn't shock anyone when women present themselves in such a setting. When men take on this role, all the national TV stations send their reporters. Ewa, Iwona's sister, writes on the website: "I am in shock. Remember, you have put yourself in a sticky situation. And you know what it can attract?? FLIES! In other words, men. Desperate ones!" Her uncle from Lublin writes: "I am not interested in this kind of nonsense but I am always happy when I see Iwona's photo in the newspaper".

Iwona reverses the roles. She actively searches for a husband. And has the guts to make this matter public. This provokes numerous reactions: laughter, aggression, confusion. I felt unsure in the role of a potential suitor. Fortunately I was able to hide behind the mask of a journalist.

#### *On behalf of my son*

The Krakow pub is completely packed. Reporters are squeezing confessions out of the potential candidates. Krystian is 26, he studies linguistics. He likes going to castings. He even won one of them, a Leonardo DiCaprio look-alike. He's dressed in black, has a pony tail, a pendant made out of a sea shell hangs around his neck (present from a previous girlfriend). "My relationships are quick - he explains - the passion lasts several weeks and then comes boredom". He's been in Krakow since seven years. During this time he's had 30 partners. Why is he here now? "Maybe she's the one? - he reflects out loud - and besides, I love cameras!" Iwona invites him to sit down. They talk surrounded by bright lights. "I feel lonely" - says Krystian. When asked whether he knows how to cook, he avoids giving a straight answer. Just after him comes an older, chubby gentleman. "I'm sorry - Iwona protests - but there is an age limit!" Mr. Jerzy is quick to react: "I am representing my son!" His son lives in Canada and is 27 years old. "He has to find himself a polish wife"- explains Mr. Jerzy - a Canadian woman won't even serve him soup out of a can."

On her website, Iwona writes this about men: "I don't like mustaches, I love big lips, you have to have balls, I have nothing against business men, you have to be sensitive and of course very good looking." Because I fulfill at least one requirement, (I don't have a mustache!) I take part. Cameramen are just a foot away. Iwona smiles and offers me some tea. Her smile is contagious. "Why aren't you married yet?" - she asks. I explain that I was. I am also a father. This apparently does not seem to bother her. I discuss my culinary talents. I describe how to make pumpkin soup. Did I pass?

#### *Russian roulette*

Piotr from Wroclaw comes just after me onto the stage. He's 30 and has very unique side burns. He came to Krakow especially to take part in Iwona's casting. He is fascinated by her idea. "I don't really like to pick up" - he explains - that's why I've been alone for some

time now. I usually wait till I am invited out for coffee. I drink the coffee and leave!" On her website he was the one that wrote: "this project puts men in their place, it reminds them who in fact is making the choices and who takes the lead".

If anyone asked for my opinion, I would say that Piotr would certainly not be my choice. In fact, none of the candidates impressed me. Perhaps these men, including myself, could fit the role of finalist for "Idol", "Big Brother" or "Russian Roulette". But that's all.

#### *The Sensitive Flirt*

"My feelings race a hundred miles an hour. Everything is turned inside out. My private life is becoming completely public, I feel like I am in front of a firing squad"- writes Iwona in her web journal - I would like someone to hold me, I want to scream at the top of my lungs!" She appears to be a flirt. "Last night in the train, I was sitting besides a handsome man and I was thinking that I will go crazy if I don't give him my telephone number. Why is it that women are still uneasy to make the first move? What stops us?" She jumps from euphoria to desperation. "I am crying...I am opening up...What is the point of all of this? To fall in love, to endure the pain, break through the fear...towards love." Slawomir Murawiec, a psychotherapist, has read her journal - "She's a highly sensitive person - he remarks - she needs love and is desperately looking for a partner. She's very real! But her search will only lead to unstable relationships, since the people that she encounters are only there to take and not to give."

#### *Marriage is like prison*

I wait that the other journalists leave the club and I invite Iwona for an evening stroll. We head towards the old town square. Iwona starts talking about herself. She left Poland when she was eight. Now she lives in Montreal. Her parents, both dentists, live in Canada along with her siblings. Her art consists of various provocations. For five weeks she distributed her telephone number in various public places in Toronto. The conversations that resulted were broadcast live inside a gallery. Her personal life is an integral part of her work. She faces the cameras head on, and publicly reveals her most intimate thoughts.

"Following every action I feel destabilized, and need time to recover - she says - but I know I am gaining insight into myself." The conversation starts to become more intimate. She asks about my flaws. I speak of the anger, which destroys all my relationships. Iwona starts to recount the time she fell in love during the project. They wrote to each other, spoke on the phone, and finally he came to visit her. "Suddenly he disappeared - she says with a tone of sadness - maybe he got scared when he realized this is not a joke. I was really hurt..." For a moment we remain quiet. "I am afraid of marriage - says Iwona - it reminds me of prison."

#### *Women and Myths*

Women also write to Iwona. Some try to get at the sensitive points: "Woman, you wonder why you're alone. Simple. You are ugly, not appealing, and stupid."- signed Agnieszka, the content wife. But most of the letters are in support of what Iwona is doing. "Your diary really moved me - writes Aga - it reminds me of my own from a few years back. Except I never had the courage to show it to anyone." Maybe Iwona has started a new trend of building relationships? Maja is not surprised by how Iwona has chosen to go about this. "What is most important here is the effect."

Iwona's action is a provocation. She announces her desire to get married at a time when the numbers of people getting married each year in Poland is declining (by 100 000 people yearly in comparison to the beginning of the eighties), and young women declare their wish for independence. According to a study done by ELLE last year, almost half of our readers live on their own. Every fourth woman is married. "Women are less and less willing to trade in their professional aspirations in order to get married - comments Magdalena Sroda - But their desires don't diminish. Women just like men, are part of society and so it is hard to be completely on their own. We want to be loved and also need to love."

#### *Searching for Love*

Strolling through Krakow, I am starting to believe that anything is possible. "Maybe it's time that women became more active? - wonders Magdalena Sroda, when I tell her about the story I'm covering. - We could all benefit. Men could take a break; they could go to a casting, maybe they'll be chosen by some energetic woman, who for the price of obedience and house work (shopping, cleaning, childcare, ironing, cooking etc.) will provide them

with security, the satisfying role of becoming a father, and sometimes give tokens in form of a gift or a trip. Wouldn't that be nice?"

Perhaps not. I return to Warsaw and my conversations with Iwona become more and more professional. On Valentine's Day, several hundred spectators wait in Krakow's Bunkier Sztuki for Iwona to make her announcement. Once again a flock of reporters and their camera met have gathered for the event. Iwona thanks everyone for coming. "As for my future husband – she says into the mike. – I am still looking...". The stunned public begins to leave. I have the feeling that Iwona played a joke on us. We were waiting for a melodrama, instead we got...this.

The dream of a romance blossoming in front of the cameras begins to fade along with the artist's melodic laughter...