

19. SZUKAM GORBACHOVA FILM. docx

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EXPLORER: "LOOKING FOR GORBACHEV IN POLAND"

This is Warsaw, capital of Poland, the city where I was born and lived for over thirty years. Some twenty years ago, I was a journalist in this city, a Polish television reporter whose face was easily recognized in a Warsaw tram. In this country as a journalist, I was supposed to become "an engineer of the human soul," developing a new, socialist man. I didn't take the challenge of my profession. I took off.

The memories are coming back. One is of the Joseph Stalin Palace of Culture. This Soviet imposition on urban design we called "a white elephant in lace panties." We were supposed to live our lives the "Big Brother" way, but never really adapted to it.

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"The country is falling apart," I am told, and I see proof of the decay. At first, the government blamed "Solidarity" strikes for it, but now, beating its breast, it admits that the socialist economy over a period of forty-three years has been an economy of waste. "Yes, we screwed up," says the party, encouraging the people to take their small economies into their own hands. The SOS signal is being broadcast to the West: "Save Our Souls." A village market in the midst of a capital city, with both sellers and buyers holding college degrees strikes me

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 as an irony. So, is Capitalism okay in Poland after all?

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 During the Cold War, when McCarthy was looking for communists in America, Polish police were looking for capitalists in Warsaw. For lack of a better candidate, I, a ten year old boy, was arrested here in front of the U.S. Embassy under suspicion of watching the American movie inside.

40 YEARS LATER I FOUND THE

~~Changes may enter the economy, but~~ lack of freedom is still intact. This is the hallway of the Warsaw district court. Janusz Onyszkiewicz, former Solidarity spokesman, is on trial again, this time for libel. He told the Western press that during the last May Day demonstration, the police were beating Solidarity followers ~~with~~ wooden sticks. "There is no such thing in our police inventory," claims the government, "we only use rubber."

He brought still photographs of a plainclothes policeman with broken banner sticks in his hands as evidence, but the court refuses to view it. ~~It~~ "It's a parody of justice," says a woman, "nothing but lies, makes you sick to your stomach."

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 Poland needs a Gorbachev, I conclude, and decide to look for one. Here is a candidate. His name is Mieczyslaw Rakowski, age sixty-two, Ph.D. in History, former government negotiator with

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cont.

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"Solidarity," who later plotted Martial Law.

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Each day before he goes to work at the Party's Central Committee where he is in charge of propaganda, his bodyguard drops him here at the five star Inter-Continental Hotel, where he swims ten laps to stay in shape.

In my time, he was the editor of "Polityka," a party weekly known for its liberalism. His role in the suspension of "Solidarity," however, cost him not only his liberal reputation, but also a separation from his family: both his wife and two sons emigrated to the West. Since the rise of Gorbachev in Russia, Rakowski champions a new liberalism within the party and many see him as a successor to General Jaruzelski.

"I am here to humanize the communists," I tell him to break the ice and he concurs. I am at a double advantage with him: for one, we have common friends, and two, I come from the United States, where he would like to be visible.

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"Today we are supposed to have a weekly Politburo meeting, but as our new policy, once a month we talk with the workers. He offers me a ride with him to a petrochemical factory near Warsaw. This is the view of the forty billion dollar debt Poland owes the West as a result of building plants like this one in the late



This is NARRATION

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'60s. With marshall law antagonizing Western banks, today they it all suffer for lack of funds for spare parts, maintenance and renovation. The Polish economy today is like a snake eating its own tail, it consumes more than it produces. Unlike most state industry, this factory has not experienced labor unrest. It employs a small crew of highly skilled workers paid relatively well to take care of expensive machinery. Rakowski has chosen a safe place to visit.

Rakowski tells in his GOVERNMENT LIMOUSINE.

Rakowski M

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The routine for visiting party politicians has been the same: with or without Gorbachev. Selected workers with the broadest smiles answer the same questions. "How is work?" "Fine." "What are the problems?" "None." "How much do you make? Does your wife work? How much does she make?" "She is a teacher. Twenty-five thousand zlotys per month." "That makes seventy-five thousand with your salary," figures Rakowski. "How many children?" "Three." "How much extra per child?" "Two thousand." "That makes eighty-one thousand," Rakowski calculates, "and that doesn't include bonuses, right?" "Right." "You had two additional monthly salaries this year, right?" "Right." "Do you have an apartment?" "Sure. Three hundred, twenty-five square feet for the five of us." "Subsidized by the factory?" "Yes." "Can you make ends meet?" "It's enough just for food and kids clothes. Hard to save a penny." "No savings at all?" "No." "But a little reserve of twenty thousand, thirty

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used to  
 today - workers often sit on  
 benches  
 Speck  
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bonuses

Today, Robert saw since low low - then some more and...  
 some more and...  
 then



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thousand must be somewhere," insists Rakowski. "No way. Nothing."

up  
Decade in that system — they don't have to take responsibility for their own lives.

On our way back, I ask Rakowski the burning question: "What would have happened to 'Solidarity' had Gorbachev been in power in 1981?" "It would all depend on whether 'Solidarity' would have softened its hard anti-Soviet edge," he answers. "But weren't you motivated by fear; wouldn't your position be different with the support of a liberal Soviet leader?" I continue. "Of course it would," he answers, "fear is a political category." "So chances are," I conclude, "that you would have found a political solution and avoided Martial Law." "I think so," he agrees, "but on the other hand, by a historical paradox, without Martial Law in Poland, there would be no Gorbachev in Russia."

"The problem both Gorbachev and we have to solve now," Rakowski tells me, "is how to switch from our old collectivism to the individualism that is the basis of your capitalist system." What he doesn't mention, however, is that instead of being the leader of such a change, the party can easily become its target.

"Unfortunately," he argues, "the majority of this society has accepted the benefits of the collective system, finding it

FS, FS 13 FS, FS Most Poles

~~When making responsible can be~~  
~~quicker~~

have

~~which helps~~

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convenient for an individual to hide behind the group and avoid responsibility." What Rakowski forgets is that since the installation of this system by the Soviets, Poles never had a choice. If the party really wants to change they must begin here at the Polish parliament, where until now, it was a rubber stamp for the Party's views with Rakowski at its helm.

I am riding with a man who had the luxury of making a choice. Lech Zembrzuski was a Polish diplomat in London who quit his job, got himself a BMW, and returned to Warsaw to become a "perestroika" capitalist. In someone's backyard, he rented a shack. From a state factory, he bought two old lathes, recruited two of their best machinists, and doubled their state wages.

For the British client he met in London, Lech makes gears used in aircraft engines. Every six weeks, Lech sends him eight gears, worth twelve hundred dollars. Anticipating more income, the Zembrzuski's want to build a house.

Lech and his wife, Anna, are now on their way to see another entrepreneur who wants to build their house.

The builder's name is Julinn Lechowicz. As a young man, he built houses in Poland until the government's hostility toward private business chased him out of the country.

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He emigrated to Springfield, Massachusetts, where for twenty years he built wood frame houses. When he heard about "perestroika," he left his business to his son, packed a bunch of catalogues and returned to Poland. <sup>FS</sup> Now he wants to introduce this unknown two by four technology to a Poland hungry for housing.

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Julian is not a man of small schemes. He tells his clients that plans for the design of some eight hundred houses are complete and the transaction to buy the land almost finalized.

"Almost?" worries Anna, "we thought we own the land already!"

"C'mon," says the ~~veteran~~ Polish capitalist, "you know the bureaucracy here, nothing goes fast."

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"How can you build the house in six months when it takes longer for wood to dry and you haven't purchased it yet?" ~~she~~

probes, ANNA

"We, Americans, love challenges and know how to solve problems," answers Julian and introduces the subject of kitchen cabinets. "I can offer you any color from the light to the dark," gushes Julian, "the only problem is that I could not match it with the Soviet-made refrigerators... they only come in one color."



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ant.



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NARR:

This is the land he wants to build on. It belongs to many private farmers who got it out of the agrarian reform. But since the land was given by the state, to sell it to a private person was forbidden until recently. In Julian's scheme, ninety percent of financing must come from the state, which is just beginning to learn the concept of mortgaging.

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"So, which lot is ours?" asks Anna. "Well, it will be located exactly between the highest birch on the left and the second cow on the right," *ANSWERS Julian.*



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Poland's teflon man is Marek Zlotopolski, He is not a president, he is, a thirty-three year old chemist working for the state, who wants to go private and mass produce teflon piping badly needed in Poland. He has just bought an abandoned factory and calls it his "promised land." "Until now, every scrap of teflon had to be imported, while the original Polish technology was collecting dust," *explains Marek.*

*sets Marek tells me,*

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He just returned from a state agency in charge of private entrepreneurs and cannot believe their stupidity. He tells his architect and co-owner of the land that the contract they both signed to form a partnership has not been accepted. "It's absurd," says the architect.

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The road to capitalism is a bumpy one. The word itself is still taboo. You call it "free initiative," so the socialists can take credit for it. <sup>19 FS</sup> Marek used private money for the land and building, and now he expects the state to loan him the money to begin production, but the state still drags its feet. "In a year," says the teflon man, "everything here will be nicely finished, a huge business logo painted on the wall, cars parked in front of the building, you will see."

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I visit a man who has already made it. A former European car racing champion, he made his first money as an Audi factory team driver. <sup>FS</sup> Twenty-five years ago, he invested it in a then very risky private business. Today, on the wave of perestroika, in the middle of farmland, Sobieslaw Zasada expands his enterprise. He builds a refrigeration plant to store Polish strawberries before rushing them to West Germany. "We are the first who brought technology to this area," he tells me, "it's hard to find a skillful worker here, no matter what you offer to pay."

<sup>MARK</sup>  
This is <sup>HA</sup> his son-in-law, a dentist <sup>41</sup> who came to Zasada and said; "Listen, there is only one state factory producing false teeth in Poland, supplying only fifteen percent of the demand; the rest is imported. <sup>FS</sup> Let's buy used machines and manufacture

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acrylic teeth in Poland." They first went to a German factory going out of business and bought thousands of teeth, which they now sort out, hoping to sell five thousand denture kits this year. So one part of the building is being remodeled and becoming the tooth department, where the production line will be installed as soon as the strawberries bring hard currency.

262/2  
Even more than dentures, Poland used to be deprived of well functioning zippers, but not since Zasada started making them here from scratch, in a typical Western environment. In today's economic climate, with price control lifted for most industrial products, Zasada's zippers support his new investment in fruits and vegetables and allow him to run the cleanest and best organized factory of its kind. He not only pays his workers much more than the state does, but provides them with unparalleled social services, like the free dental clinic his son-in-law just opened.

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But the frosting on the cake in his business is the mini-luxury car he manufactures for the discriminating buyer. The three-horsepower lawn mower engines come from Briggs & Stratton in Milwaukee, the plastic body, paint and tires are from Germany, only labor is Polish. Two thousand of them are sold each year. If it is for a little son of a Saudi sheik, it costs two thousand dollars; if it's a European brat, it's only one thousand. Zasada



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cont.

just returned from California, which may open a new market.

Porsche is, of course, top of the line. ~~The Zasada business scheme is a tough act to follow in a country with a crippled industrial base, where basic materials are scarce.~~

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Half an hour from Zasada's factory is the Lenin Steelworks, a monument to a socialist economy built by the Soviets in the 1950s with a technology already then outdated by a decade. By all business standards, this plant employing sixteen thousand people should have been closed down a long time ago. It produces the lowest grade steel, once needed by the Soviets, but too heavy and bulky for modern applications. <sup>2021</sup> Maciej Szumowski, my former

NEAL

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colleague from Polish Television, guides me over the grave yard adjacent to the steelworks. "How can you get rid of this patriotic steelworks you've been writing poems and songs about for forty years?" jokes Maciej. We are talking about the catastrophic pollution created by this industrial monster, often forty times over the acceptable level.

To my astonishment, I learn from him that when the pollution reaches dangerous levels, the children of party officials and foreign diplomats used to be evacuated from Krakow to the countryside. Releasing the information to the general population would result in panic.

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"Death is omnipresent in this area, it comes to us directly from the air," says Maciej, as he explains the economy of family funerals. A family grave for five, one stacked on another, is a status symbol around here, it costs over a million zlotys, more than two years average salary, but a bargain compared to an apartment."

At his home

Maciej shows me his videotape shot at the recent strike at Nowa Huta Steelworks. The workers form their own May Day parade in protest against the official one organized by the government outside the factory. They raise the banners and chant, "We want bread and freedom."

"Such a protest always makes the party hysterical," says Maciej. "In this case, party officials first assured the workers that they would negotiate with them, then suddenly changed their mind and sent an anti-terrorist squad in the middle of the night."

I share with Maciej what Rakowski told me about the workers being spoiled by collectivism. "It's the utmost arrogance, he reacts, especially when it comes from the mouth of a political party which calls itself the workers party," he reacts.

BUREAU RAIS

"It's the same old concept. The authorities are not content

party line.

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Society

with the workers, so let's change the workers. This whole nation seems to be inappropriate for them, so let's change the nation. ~~isn't expect adds discipline, so~~

Why doesn't the party <sup>just</sup> get rid of itself, <sup>SINCE</sup> because it doesn't suit either the workers or the ~~nation?~~ <sup>Society</sup> Maciej gives me his radical

political platform.

in Poland.

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He tells me to forget that fairy tale about capitalism having a green light. "So far, a few chicken coops have been given away for private use," he jokes, "in many cases, into the hands of former secret police captains and other good buddies of the party bureaucrats. Why don't they give the steelworks away?"



"But who would want it?" I ask rhetorically and offer it to him. No, he's not interested. ~~He doesn't think the steelworks make sense at all, nor the old fashioned coal mines.~~ He thinks something else must be built instead, and he is positive that a broad infusion of foreign capital is the only way out for Poland. "You will find clients as soon as the state closes down a bunch of its bankrupt factories," he insists, "except that this will bankrupt the party in the process and they're not ready for it."



Emigration is a way out for many. After all, one-third of this nation already lives abroad. Each morning, some fifteen hundred people form a cue in front of the German Embassy. Only

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 one hundred will leave with a viza. The American viza is even more difficult to get, I learn from the crowd in front of the U.S. Embassy. They are all perspective tourists who want to work the day after arrival and who must convince the <sup>Consul</sup> ~~Counsel~~ that such a thought doesn't even cross their mind. So they prove their independent wealth in Poland with their nice clothes, a driver's license, or sometimes a picture of a house owned by the neighbor. The story goes that once someone showed up in a tuxedo.

"With such a noble look, I comfort an older man, no one will suspect that you plan to mop the floor in an American supermarket."

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 Grazyna Michalska wants to emigrate. She is twenty and studies at the Agricultural University in Warsaw. She is part of a generation which calls itself homeless. Living with their parents, they will never earn the millions of zlotys needed to buy their own place, and for state subsidized housing, they would have to wait up to fifty-five years. Grazyna and her twin sister, Anya, live in one tiny room; another is occupied by the parents, the kitchen is too small for eating, but this is considered high-class living in Warsaw.

"What would happen if all of us leave?" asks Grazyna's sister, "it would be a tragedy for Poland. I still have hope,"



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 she adds, "You can not assume that everything will go down the drain." "It will," answers Grazyna.

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 She brings me to one of Warsaw's communal garden plots which her parents got from the state for good service. Today, these plots have become one of the hottest commodities on the free market; a thousand square foot plot with a little hut goes for the equivalent of a year's income. Here people not only grow fruits and vegetables for themselves, but often become mini-farmers, selling the goods to neighbors. Grazyna's parents, now retired, spend at least six months of the year here, calling it their happy exile.

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 Warsaw Airport. The place where the dream of flying out materializes. I am meeting someone who experienced it all. Her name is Olympia. *PS I know her from CHICAGO.* She may be the only Olympia among the daughters of Polish farmers. To name a daughter after a mythological Greek mountain instead of a good Catholic saint requires one of two things from a Polish farmer: enormous imagination or drunkenness. Olympia has not seen her Polish family for eight years. Eight years ago, long before Gorbachev, she declared her own "perestroika," and went to America alone. Over these years, she missed the marriages of her two sons, the births of her two grandchildren and, of course, she has been missing her husband, Antony.

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I know her from Chicago. Across the street from us, a lawyer couple with two small children and two big dogs used to live in a six bedroom mansion. Olympia was their maid. On Sundays, we would invite her to our home and speak Polish together. When the lawyers moved to the suburbs, Olympia went with them. She still cleans, shops, cooks and drives the kids to school, to swimming, to skating, and to dancing and violin lessons.

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"Look at this Polonez, Olympia, the red one, <sup>says her sons</sup> that's your car." The Polonez is Polish-made, top of the line; even the government uses them. This is one of the two cars Olympia bought for her sons from her American savings. She also bought each an apartment. The two-car motorcade now carries her to her home town of Bialystok of forty years ago. She calls that move the first escape in her life; the second was America.

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Eight years ago, one of her neighbors arranged for an invitation from an "American cousin," a famous ploy generations of Poles have been using as a way to get to the States. A tourist for the first six months, she hid in the wood work for the remaining seven and a half years, until a recent amnesty for illegal aliens made her an American resident and allowed her to travel to Poland. 3132



32 265/3 *next:*

"We thank you for everything you did for us, for your helping our life here," her son, Tomasz offers the toast. "And we hope your vacation will be filled with many nice moments with us." "Too bad we're missing the rest of our family at the table," answers Olympia.

*266/1*

*her family* *village*

The rest of ~~them~~ still live in the ~~country~~. This northeastern part of Poland is known for both its beauty and its poor soil. To the left of the road lives her only surviving brother with his wife, two daughters, two sons-in-law, and two granddaughters.

"My brother had no imagination when he built this house," Olympia told me in Chicago, "too much kitchen and not enough sleeping room for eight people. I told him he was building a stupid house, but instead of listening to me, he listened to his wife. But what can you do with a stubborn farmer?"

Her niece, Ewa. Her sister-in-law. And her older brother, seventy-five years old, who she thinks is on his last legs. "What does the doctor say?" asks Tomasz. "Nothing. There is no medicine for it."

~~up \*~~

↓

*down*

This is a one-pig farm. The twelve piglets bring the only

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 profit they make, since nothing grows on their fourteen acres. Today, Ewa's husband, Janek, who supports the family cutting tombstones at the local cemetery, took the day off and went fishing. Tomasz announces the arrival of the American aunt.

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 An experienced Polish maid in Chicago, Olympia makes three hundred dollars for a six day week. The one hundred dollars she gives to her niece represent, at the free market exchange, a hundred and eighty-five thousand zlotys. What takes Olympia two days to earn in Chicago equals the annual earnings of her brother's farm near Bialystok. "Why don't you kiss your aunt?" says Ewa to her husband. "C'mon," says Olympia, "I don't need ten kisses for the stupid hundred dollars."

HERE COMES 266/2 FROM THE NEXT PAGE.

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 On this farm across the road, Olympia was born. It is now occupied by her younger brother's widow, her nephew Kazik, and his wife and child.

A dish of cucumbers, buttermilk and potatoes is on the table. It is called "mizeria" from the word "misery," because no matter how hard times are, a farmer can always afford to put "mizeria" on the table. With fifty dollars in her hand, Olympia does not hesitate to scold her nephew. "If you would only stop drinking," lectures the American aunt. But Kazik has a counter argument. "Our life is so hard, the farmer needs to release his



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worries," he says, "one glass, two glasses of vodka and you're full of joy."

"I may be old fashioned," Olympia tells her niece, Ewa, "but you must be from the middle ages, keeping the child so warm." "Look at her, she talks like an American," answers Ewa.

Olympia demonstrates her English to her family and asks me to be her translator. She talks about hard times she had in the village and her dream of moving to the city. The small of oranges was what attracted Olympia to city life. <sup>33</sup>"Why aren't we in the city, where people can eat oranges," she always wondered.

266/2  
EVERY  
CHAPTER

<sup>34</sup> Olympia's brother gives us an economics lesson. "A Jew once owned a factory here. Three hundred people worked for him. The Jew himself, his daughter and his son-in-law, just three people, ran the business. The communists came and took over the factory. Now three hundred people still work there, but you know how many of them are bureaucrats? A hundred and fifty."

<sup>44</sup> "Poles belong in Poland," Olympia tells me, "but since Poland can not take care of itself, some of us become servants in a rich foreign land, so our families won't deteriorate."

According to the latest statistics, the Olympias of Poland <sup>45</sup> earn more Western currency than the state makes from its exports.

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Back in the city with her best friend, Danuta, who after years of cleaning houses in New York returned with a dozen wedding dresses and now rents them out. The young girl is Danuta's daughter who will get married in a few days.

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"We believe in every love and every truth, knowing that it is only an illusion," goes the song Urszula practices for her wedding. "Tired of screaming and lamenting about our little country, we believe in anything so we won't feel the pain."

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In two weeks, Olympia will be back in Chicago. Her goal from now on will be to stay long enough to qualify for Social Security benefits, then return for good and cash them in Zlotys. All her life, she has been a home-maker and the name of her home is Poland.