

Rachel Brew

The Hand of Life

"Pump number 5. Yes, that's right. €38.70. And I'll take an Irish Times and a Mars bar," I said.

"Do you want cash back?" she replied with a polite smile, as she accepted my debit card. I couldn't help but notice how attractive she was, tall and slim with wide expressive eyes and the most luxuriant shoulder length brown hair.

She was obviously not Irish.

"Where are you from?" I enquired.

"From Poland, from Krakow," she smiled. And yes, she does love Dublin, she thinks the Irish are very friendly and she is making lots of new friends since she came here.

"And were you a student in Poland? What did you do before you came to Dublin?"

"I have finished my studies in Krakow and then Gdansk. I studied Science and then Oceanography. But now I must work to improve my English."

As she handed me back my card and my receipt with a charming "thank you" I pondered it is little wonder that so many of our young Irishmen are attracted to these Polish girls that seem to have invaded our country.

And now, over three years later, here I am in Krakow on the eve of your wedding. My husband and I will be privileged guests at your celebration tomorrow. Tomorrow you will marry that Irish boy who is so in love with you - and you with him. Both of you seem ideally suited - well matched in disposition, in intelligence and spirituality.

But no marriage is easy. In Medjugore, the bridal couple vow to take one another to be their cross, which is a sign of both sacrifice and redemption. This young Irish man, who is king of your heart today, is no plaster saint, my child. I've known his father for a long time and in many ways he is a chip off the old block. I imagine he would be a bit of a selfish, untidy, undomesticated Irish male; but remember, given time and patience, most men can be trained to do most things!

He will also swear to you that he loves you more than he can say, you mean all the world to him. Remember, he truly believes this himself, but really he loves you only as

much as it is possible for him to love another human being. However, I suppose that is a universal limitation anyway.

Nevertheless I believe that your marriage, like his parents' before him, has been made in heaven. When I married his father - how long ago? - I was "in love" with the most wonderful person in the whole world: this was merely my rose-tinted projection of him. I was largely in love with my own hopeful expectations. Now, thirty-two years later, I am no longer "in love" with my idealised image. More realistically I have learned to genuinely love, both sacrificially and redemptively, a man with all his goodness, kindness and ability interwoven with impatience, selfishness and foolishness.

You are the daughter I never conceived but inherited. Together with my son, this new world is your oyster. In the words of Kahil Gibran, "Give your hearts but not into each other's keeping. For only the hand of life can contain your hearts." Darling daughter, I love you. Please look after my son.

