

FILM

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Fortified with tributes to Ingmar Bergman (Sweden) and Volke Scholondorff (Germany); country focus on Belgium and Hungary; contemporary cinema of the world; film museum treasures; and Indian Panorama; the 38th International Film Festival at Goa was dazzling mind screen excitement. Cristian Mungiu's "4months, 3weeks and 2days"(Rumania, 2007, colour, 113 mins) has a moment's blank screen debut, with the sound of off-screen aircrafts. It is Romania of 1987. On a table at a University hostel, lie scattered cigarettes, papers, tea cups and plates. Two technical student friends, Otilia (Anamaria Marinca) and Gabita (Laura Vasiliu) share the room. Gabita is busy packing a suitcase and waxing her legs. Otilia helps her in the packing, and searches for Petronela in the shower room, to retrieve a hair dryer. On a city bus journey, Otilia does not have a ticket; when the inspectors board, an unknown male passenger helps her out. In the mixed dormitory of the hostel, foreign cigarettes are easily available.

At a medical college hospital, Otilia meets her boy friend, Adi (Alexandru Potoceanu). Adi invites Otilia home, to attend his mother's birthday. His mother would complete 48 or 49 years, and he requests for gladioli or carnation flowers. A hotel receptionist informs Otilia that there was no reservation, in the name of Dragut Gabita. The woman receptionist gets busy on a telephone talk, ascertaining the outcome of wage negotiations. Otilia buys American Kent cigarettes from a vendor in the hotel lobby. Unable to get a vacant room, Otilia books an expensive room with three beds, at another hotel. The cost is 1861 lei for two days. At a street crossing, Otilia meets a stranger, Bebe (Vlad Ivanov) who has been waiting for her in a red car. Bebe and Otilia drive off. There are queues before shops. Bebe has been connected to the student friends, through an acquaintance, Romona. Otilia tells him that she failed to get bookings at the suggested hotels in a desired neighbourhood, since they were all full. She informs that she was from Campulung. Bebe has been apprised earlier that Otilia and Gabita were sisters, (though not true). He emphasizes that trust is primary in the abortion task, to be conducted. He stops the car before a house, and asks an old woman before the doorsteps, as to why she was not resting inside. As they drive off, a ball crashes on the car. The hotel receptionist demands that all visitors were to be announced. Bebe leaves his identity card, along with a tip at the reception. Inside the hotel suite, Gabita tells Bebe that she was in the third month of pregnancy. Her blood group was 'O'; and she suffered from nil blood pressure and nil allergy. Bebe explains that there would be no anaesthesia. But the abortion would hurt, along with bleeding. A probe was to be put in. Gabita had left a plastic sheet in the dormitory. Bebe requires a plastic sheet or plastic bag.

The patient must not move under any circumstances. Bebe elaborates on contraction, bleeding and safeguards against infection. Gabita lies down and unzips her trousers. Bebe examines Gabita's belly, with Otilia present. He explains that abortion was totally prohibited in Romania; and that after four months it was treated as murder, which could lead to five to ten years prison sentence. He advises Gabita to go to a doctor, if her periods were irregular. In

the fourth fifth month, abortion was dangerous. But Gabita is pregnant for four months, a fact which she has concealed. Bebe demands 5000 lei for the abortion, but the girls are left with only 2850 lei, after paying the rent. Bebe declines on the price, and there are differences on the remuneration. He declines to risk ten years jail for 3000 lei. The friends have arguments, and Otilia assures another 2000 lei by three days, through borrowings from Adi and home. Bebe shouts at Otilia, and when he is about to leave, Gabita discloses that they were not sisters, but only hostel room mates. Gabita pleads Bebe to stay, and says that Otilia was under no obligations. As Otilia undresses and offers herself to Bebe, Gabita cries. Opening the basin tap, Gabita smokes in the toilet. Otilia clouches herself in the bath tub. When Bebe goes to the toilet, Otilia removes a knife from his briefcase.

Soon Bebe puts on surgical gloves, and pulls out gauze, spirits, lotion and a probe. Gabita lies in bed, undressed. Bebe puts water in the syringe, and pushes the probe into Gabita. While water is injected, Gabita feels the sting. Bebe advises that Gabita's temperature was to be taken, in the morning and evening. After he leaves with his brief case, Otilia puts the knife back on the table. Gabita thanks Otilia, who sits silently and wonders as to why Romona suggested Bebe, and not a woman. Otilia accuses Gabita of lying about their being sisters, and on the incorrect age of the foetus. She feels that Gabita's stupid ideas had led to all the difficulties. Gabita felt she opted for Bebe because it was cheaper, and not that he was a man. Behind Gabita's bed is a weird painting of a jug with red stains, and an old man reclining. Bebe has not collected his Identity card from the hotel reception; and the reception gives the card to Otilia as she is leaving for Adi's mother's birthday. Otilia is on the train, with a blank face full of grief. She reaches the birthday party late, without any flowers. She is greeted warmly by Gina, Adi's mother; and introduced by Adi's doctor father, Grisor, to the other guests, who are mostly doctors. For sometime, Otilia sits in the toilet quietly. The elders dine and talk loudly on politics, farming, poultry and butter. Otilia and Adi sit quietly at the dining table, and watch the others. One diner finds odd Otilia smoking in front of Adi's parents. She puts off the cigarette. The tension and long stares keep mounting in Otilia.

Adi opens the champagne bottle, and Otilia joins in the happy birthday song felicitations for Adi's mother. He finds Otilia strange ever since they arrived. They talk in Adi's bedroom. Otilia discloses the help extended in Gabita's abortion, and requests for a loan of 300 lei. She also accuses Adi of not taking precautions on her unsafe days. Adi's mother walks in with the dessert cream. Gabita does not respond to Otilia's phone calls. Otilia ascertains from the hotel that Bebe has not visited. She leaves Adi's residence, with tears in her eyes. Without waiting for the lift, she walks down the staircase, and rushes through deserted streets. She runs along through mist and fog, and vomits on the road. She walks along a highway. The street lights, the bridge over rail tracks and the night sky are dark and sombre. Returing to the hotel by train, Otilia finds music and a party. Rushing to her hotel suite, she finds Gabita sleeping. Waking up, Gabita informs that she had got rid of the foetus, and it was lying in the bathroom. Otilia wraps up the dead foetus with a towel, and puts it in a bag. Gabita requests that the foetus be burnt. With the bag, Otilia runs along the wet streets, with snow. The camera pans along high rise buildings. She speaks to a stranger about the last bus and taxis. When she halts near a

garbage vat, a dog starts barking. A car stops and the driver starts shouting. In fear, Otilia enters an apartment block, and dumps the foetus bag in the garbage chute at a high rise level. Returning to the hotel, Otilia finds that there has been a fight at the wedding party, and an injured man is stretched out on a sofa.

Gabita is at the hotel dining room, smoking. Otilia declines to talk, when Gabita enquires whether the foetus has been buried. They order food, and smoke and drink. In the background, guests dance at the wedding party. The film concludes abruptly, with the two friends at the table, looking at the camera, "4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days" is a thriller, with an anti-hitchcock model, displaying objects like a knife, which are never used. Mungiu's film avoids debates on Rumania of 1987, but is a metaphor on the absurdities and cruelties of the system. Oleg Mutu's close ups and brisk pans record the ordinary lives, the transfer of responsibilities, and the emotions. The abortion remains a horrific point of departure, for any change of times.□