

One Floor Below / Un etaj mai jos (2015)

RADU MUNTEAN

OVERVIEW

Auteur Radu Muntean (b. 1971) is a Romanian film director and screenwriter and a prominent figure of the Romanian New Wave that emerged after the fall of the communist regime in Romania in 1989. The son of a reputed director, filmmaker and TV producer, Muntean obtained his film directing degree from the Theatre and Film Academy (Bucharest) in 1994. Apart from his highly valued work in the cinema (documentaries, short movies and feature films), Muntean has also applied his artistic expertise to the advertising industry and directed numerous commercials for which he has won national and international awards in industry-related festivals.

Film *One Floor Below* is a production of Multi Media East in collaboration with Les Films de l'Après-midi (France), Neue Mediopolis Filmproduktion (Germany) and Bleck Film & TV AB (Sweden). Owing to film critics' very positive feedback and the enthusiastic reception by the international press, the movie has been purchased and distributed worldwide. Between 2015 and 2016 Muntean's movie obtained the highest awards at Hamburg Film Festival, National Society of Film Critics Awards, USA (Special Citation for a film awaiting American Distribution), RiverRun International Film Festival (Jury Prize for three categories: Best Director of a Feature Film, Best Screenplay and Peter Brunette Award for Best Director), Seville European Film Festival (for Best Screenplay and Best Actor) and FICUNAM Festival International de CINE UNAM. The movie was also nominated for *Un Certain Regard Award* at Cannes, Cleveland International Film Festival, Ghent International Film Festival and Gopo Awards (a highly prestigious national award in Romania, similar to the Academy Awards in the US) in seven categories.

Cinematic Narration The movie narrative has a linear structure, with a major focus on the characters' feelings and attitudes rather than actions. The camera zooms-in and out follow especially the main protagonist to capture his personal anguish and efforts to hide it from the others. Some of the story events and meanings are cryptic, which heightens tension and the viewers' sense of anticipation at a resolution that never comes. The movie explores the impact of Laura's violent death on her block of flats community and the crisis of conscience of the main protagonist, who happens to be around the event, but decides to remain silent about it. However, several important questions remain unanswered, and hence open to viewers' own interpretations. On the one hand, this narrative technique increases suspense on the story level, but, on the other hand, it invites viewers to take part in the process of the story construction, offering them the freedom to come up with their own version of what may have happened to Laura [just as the neighbors do] and of Sandu's motivation to keep what he knows about it a secret. Muntean creates an intimate portrayal of how people in a shared residential space like a block of flats fail to understand the common good and act accordingly.

Director's Views Muntean has stated in his interviews that he was mainly preoccupied with the main protagonist's moral dilemma and how the 'demon of doubt' slowly undermines the seemingly indestructible state of calmness of an ordinary man with a good material and mental comfort. Yet again, Muntean has wrapped his movie up in the realistic, minimalist and anti-entertainment aesthetics of the Romanian New Wave

SYNOPSIS

Set in Bucharest, Romania, around the mid=2000s, the story events revolve Sandu Patrascu, a dynamic private entrepreneur, who runs a small business in the vehicle registration services together with his wife, Olga. One morning, Sandu passes by one of his neighbors' door, Laura Pascu, and overhears her heated argument with someone, who turns out to be another neighbor, Valentin Dima (Vali). Later that day, Laura is found dead, her skull cracked, which gives rise to numerous speculations among the neighbors. The police investigate the case, but cannot find any evidence that she might have been murdered. When the investigating police inspector comes to his house to talk to him and Olga, Sandu, the only one who has some possibly incriminating information, says he has not heard or seen anything that is worth mentioning. He wrestles with his conscience, and as much as he may try to continue with his daily routines, he has moments when he either gets irritable or lost in thoughts. Vali, who saw Sandu by Laura's door as he was storming out of her flat, finds various excuses to approach Sandu and his family. To Sandu's despair, he becomes more and more intrusive. The increasing tension between the two men ensues in a fierce fight and a death threat from Sandu for Vali if he dares come near him or his family again.

CHARACTERS

<i>Sandu Patrascu</i>	The manager of a private vehicle registration service company
<i>Olga Patrascu</i>	Sandu's wife and business partner
<i>Matei Patrascu</i>	Sandu and Olga's teenage son
<i>Valentin Dima (Vali)</i>	A neighbor of the Patrascu family
<i>Claudia Dima</i>	Vali's wife

<i>Mrs. Patrascu</i>	Sandu's mom
<i>Manescu</i>	A Police Chief-inspector
<i>Laura Pascu</i>	A neighbor of the Patrascu family

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Sandu Sandu is a middle-aged entrepreneur, with an enterprising spirit and a friendly character. He runs his business in a very professional manner and solves work-related problems promptly. He is a caring family man and the proud owner of a dog called Jerry.

Hardworking Sandu is very dedicated to his family business and works hard to keep his clients satisfied. While working, he either talks to clients on the phone, or fills out forms, or pays registration fees and taxes for them. An illustrative scene of his professional commitment is when he himself drives a busy customer's car to the Vehicle Registration Office and, at the same time, guides another client and explains the registration procedure, assuring him of his full support, 'I'm right behind you...No stress.'

Resourceful Sandu's respectful attitude and sense of reliability are key skills that he puts to good use to complete his service even if sometimes that means missing a standard registration procedure. This happens when during the registration procedures at the Vehicle Registration Office, Vali's car is initially rejected on the grounds that it has not got a valid mandatory periodical technical inspection. Sandu immediately talks to the engineer in charge and convinces him to give him permission to have Vali's car registered without the document, promising to sort it out later.

Secretive Sandu overhears the row noise coming from Laura's flat before she is found dead, but he keeps a secret of it both from both the police and his wife. Even when he is bluntly confronted by Vali to say why he has not reported on him, Sandu initially ignores the question and acts cool as if he did not to understand his neighbor's accusation.

Vali Vali appears to have multiple personalities. In various social contexts he can be pleasant and helpful, but in private moments (e.g., with Laura), he turns into a cruel and violent man. Similarly, he displays a passive aggressive attitude towards Sandu and intrudes into his life shamelessly.

Intrusive Ever since Vali realizes that Sandu overheard his fight with Laura, he uses his computer knowledge as an excuse to come closer to the Patrascu family. One afternoon Sandu is troubled to find Vali in very familiar terms with Olga and Matei in the living room. Vali has come to install some extra hardware so that Matei can play his favorite computer games. Another time, Sandu finds Vali eating in the kitchen. He scolds his wife for giving him food, but Olga replies helplessly, 'He saw Matei eating and said he was hungry, too and asked for food.'

Passive aggressive Vali often displays a subtle wicked grin whenever he meets Sandu. He invades Sandu's personal space by often getting quite close to him physically. When, for example, he comes out of Laura's flat they fight, he sees Sandu by the door. Sandu rushes up the stairs, but Vali follows him for a few steps with a scowl on his face and a threatening body posture.

Violent Vali's violent side comes out in the scene in which he can no longer refrain himself and confronts Sandu about his reason not to lead the police to him for Laura's death. Although Sandu is not only the first to slap, but also stronger, Vali does not back down. He hits back immediately and continues to punch and kick brutally until Sandu knocks him down.

Olga Olga is a middle-aged woman, good-natured, committed to her family as well as friendly and open in social situations. She is a caring mother and wife, but also works hard for the family business.

Hardworking Not only does Olga do the household chores and cooking for the family, but she also works as a partner in the family business. She helps Sandu with the paperwork and does not hesitate to deal with clients when her husband is busy. For instance, as they are preparing for a small family party to celebrate Olga's birthday, he asks her: 'Will you take Manasan over tomorrow?' Olga replies swiftly, 'Of course, where?...Sure, I'll take him over', and offers to sort the paperwork out for that client, too.

Caring When Sandu gets home after the fight with Vali, Olga gets very worried about her husband's bruises. 'Oh, look, right under your eye', she says while checking Sandu's bruised eye. She then checks his hand and takes him to the kitchen to put something cold on it. Later, as they work together in the living and she sees Sandu making an effort to use his injured hand to write, she offers again to do the work for him.

Motherly Olga is generally very attentive to Matei's needs. She asks for Vali's help to buy him the computer hardware to play Street Fighters. Olga's motherly affection for her son manifests itself especially at the moment he wakes up disoriented because of a bad dream. She calls him to her and Sandu's bed, 'Come, stay with us. Let's sleep.' Then, she helps Matei snuggle up close to her and gently covers him with the blanket while putting her arm around him in a protective manner.

THEMES

CRIME The movie storyline revolves around the mysterious circumstances of young university student Laura Pascu's death. Returning with his dog from a morning walk, Sandu hears Laura screaming at a man in one of the flats below the floor he lives on. Later that day he finds out that she was found dead, her skull cracked. The woman's suspicious death gives rise to various speculations among the neighbors. The police also come to investigate the case, but cannot find anything to point to a murder. Sandu is the only witness who happens to have passed by the flat when what could have sounded like a crime of passion occurred. Despite his being evidently tormented by his knowledge of the circumstances of the tragic event, he remains silent about it. When the police chief-inspector calls on his house to ask him and his wife questions about their dead neighbor and whether they remember any details 'which may have seemed unimportant' at the time but could help with the investigation now, Sandu keeps possibly incriminating evidence to himself. Thus, whether the woman's tragic death was a premeditated murder or accident, Sandu's purposefully omitting to tell the police inspector what he knows may be yet just another form of crime.

VIOLENCE One of the most illustrative scenes of violence is at the Vehicle Registration Office. While waiting for the turn of his car to be checked and registered, Vali suddenly gives Sandu a conspiratorial smirk and asks him why he has not said anything to the police. Visibly shocked by Vali's confronting him so directly, Sandu initially ignores the question and urges him to drive in. Vali, however, repeats his question again in a provocative manner and adds, 'Do you want me to turn you in? Is this what you are waiting for?' The vehicle registration procedure is about to be finalized, and Sandu turns to Vali and tells him in a threatening tone to leave the money for the bill in his postbox and never come near him or his family again, saying, 'I don't care about what you did or why you don't say anything about it. It's your problem. Just leave me out of it.' Vali provokes him again, 'You're talking nonsense!...If you hadn't cared, you wouldn't have eavesdropped outside doors! Did you like what you heard?' Sandu loses his temper and slaps Vali, who, in response, spits on him, and the two men start yelling, hitting and swearing at each other. The two men also punch and kick each other. Two employees hardly manage to restrain Sandu from kicking Vali who has been punched to the ground in the fight.

INVESTIGATION Laura's death occurred in mysterious circumstances, and the police come to investigate. Police tape is placed around the outside edges of the victim's flat door and some officers talk to the residents of the block of flat for any leads that may help understand what happened. Manescu, a police chief-inspector, comes to talk to Sandu and his wife, separately. The police inspector asks Sandu to think carefully and give precise answers to his questions: 'Do you know your neighbors well? Have you found out about what happened in your block of flats earlier today? When did you last see her? Have you ever seen her in somebody's company?' Sandu says that the only time he saw the victim with someone was when the victim moved in the block, and that person was her sister. The officer then asks Sandu if he can point to any 'friends, acquaintances or possible life partners', but Sandu replies calmly: 'How should I know? No, I can't.' When the inspector asks Sandu about gossips, suspicious noises or things he may have heard or seen, Sandu lies convincingly: 'I don't remember, no.' As Sandu is seeing Manescu off to the door, he wants to know what 'has actually happened'. The officer answers: 'I am not sure what to tell you. There are some elements that indicate that it was not just an accident,... anyway, we'll see.'

CONFLICT The theme of conflict is examined mostly in relation to Sandu's inner torment as soon as he finds out about his neighbor's death. He is clearly troubled by the news and becomes quiet and pensive. At one point, his wife notices a change in his behavior and asks him what is wrong with him, but, as he is unable to share with her that he knows important details about the case, he reassures her, saying that he is only very tired. When, for example, he passes by Laura's flat, he stops for a moment and touches the police tape as if in disbelief and with regret. The movie does not provide an answer for whether he regrets not having intervened when he heard the fight, or not having told the police what he knows, but the event has certainly affected his state of mind. As much as Sandu may try to go on with his life as if nothing happened, the moment he is confronted by Vali about his reason of not turning him in to the police, he has a burst of savage anger against him. His violent reaction is most likely a consequence of the fact that Sandu struggles with his conscience once he chooses to keep quiet about what he involuntarily witnessed in the morning of the day Laura was found dead.

GUILT Sandu happens to be the witness of a crime, but he neither intervenes to offer his neighbor help when Vali comes out of the flat and locks her up inside, nor tells the police what he knows about it. The movie does not resolve the nature of his guilt, but shows how Sandu's attitude changes after he hears about his neighbor's death. The evening he watches a football match with two neighbors, he listens to their chat about their dead neighbor quietly, but reacts quite strongly when they express some their prejudiced opinions of her. Furthermore, in Vali's presence, as naturally as he may try to behave, Sandu cannot hide his real feelings completely. For example, one day he finds Vali eating in his kitchen and he immediately overreacts, taking his wife aside and scolding her for inviting him to eat. The fact that Sandu accepts Vali as a client in the first place may be his attempt to say that he just wants to mind his own business. However, in his interactions with Vali, Sandu becomes quieter, tense and alert, which contrasts with his generally easy-going and friendly manner. After he comes back home, his face all bruised as a result of his fight with Vali, he takes a long look at himself in the bathroom mirror. He appears to have mixed feelings: one the one hand, he

seems to be at peace that he has clarified things with Vali, but, on the other hand, apprehensive of the thought that he will have to continue living with that secret.

LIES Not only does Sandu lie to the investigating police officer, but also to his wife. First, when the police officer asks him whether he has seen the victim together with a friend or partner, Sandu says he has not. He does not reveal to the officer that in the morning he heard the neighbor fighting with someone, who turned out to be another neighbor, namely Vali. Second, in a later scene, Vali provokes Sandu and the two men fight bitterly. In the altercation, Sandu also gets a black eye and some bruises. When he arrives at home, his wife worries to see him in that state, but he reassures her, 'It's nothing, just a foolish thing'. She asks him what happened, and he replies evasively that he and Vali got into a fight with some clients because they skipped the line at the Vehicle Registration Office. After checking his eye and bruises, she wants to find out how Vali is, and he says casually, 'Vali, even worse'. In the first instance, Sandu lies to the police officer as he does not want to be involved in someone else's problems. Regardless of the good relationship he has with his wife, Sandu does not tell her what he knows or how he really got the bruises either. His hiding the truth from her might be motivated by his wish to keep his family out of a tragic death that looks like murder and, in consequence, all the legal procedures involved in such a case.

CIVIC DUTY The movie examines the theme of civic duty, or rather, its absence. Sandu's lack of action when he involuntarily witnesses a scene of domestic violence against a young woman, who lives in a flat below his, reflects an old saying, 'No sword cuts off a bowed head'. In other words, as film critic Jay Weissberg remarks, 'Keep your head down, don't get involved – a message hardly limited to one Balkan nation'. Indeed, when Sandu is later confronted by Vali, he says in a threatening tone, 'I don't care what you did. Just leave me out of it.' The movie is not explicit about whether Sandu tries to protect his family or himself by not revealing to the police what he has seen and heard on the day his neighbor was found dead. However, it gives an insight into a bitter reality of the block of flats community: people live next to each other in thin-walled flats, and yet, the human connection and concern about one another is lacking. That morning, as Sandu passes by a flat on the floor below his, he hears some banging noises and then a woman shouting, 'Leave me alone. Go back home.' He stays a little longer to listen, but he does not intervene to offer his help. When Vali comes out of the flat, locking up the girl in her own flat, Sandu rushes up the stairs without saying anything. Then the police come to investigate the girl's death around which the neighbors' gossips go two ways, that it might have been an accident or a murder. When the police come round to investigate if anyone has seen or heard anything, Sandu acts cool and lies to the officer, saying that he once saw the victim with her sister, but no one else, otherwise.

CURIOSITY This theme is explored on two levels: the neighbors' speculations and questions about the dead girl as well as Matei's curiosity about his neighbor as soon as he finds out about her death. As a matter of fact, it is Matei that brings Laura's death up when his father returns home. Sandu wants to talk with his wife, but Matei cannot wait and breaks the news to his father from his room: 'Dad, have you heard what happened? Someone's killed Laura from the first floor!' Sandu pretends to be surprised and asks his son, 'What are you saying there?' The boy answers that one of their neighbors told him that she had her 'skull cracked'. Then, he excitedly calls his father to come near his computer to show him Laura's Facebook page, explaining to him that he could access her page by following it. When the police officer comes to their house as part of the investigation, Matei is again curious about his presence and asks his father why he is there. Sandu explains to him that the police officer is there to ask some questions regarding the case, and Matei wants to know if he 'is he going to ask him any questions.' Sandu answers 'no', and Matei wonders disappointed, 'Why not? Isn't he supposed to talk to everyone? Maybe he has found the murderer!' Matei's speculation irks Sandu, who, in an authoritative tone, asks his son to 'mind his meal'.

PREJUDICE One of the most relevant scenes highlighting this theme is the one showing Sandu together with two neighbors for a football match night. As the host goes to fetch some beer, the older neighbor asks Sandu whether 'there is any news about that girl?' Sandu thoughtfully shakes his head 'no'. The neighbor then says that he has heard that she was 'a bit of a tramp'. The host comes back and reinforces the earlier point with confidence, 'I say she was a tramp'. When Sandu asks him how he can be so sure about it, the host replies, 'She says that she is a student, but in the evening she prostitutes herself in clubs'. Sandu is visibly troubled by this comment and asks him again, 'How do you know?' The host then goes, 'Didn't you say that she was going to Italy?' Sandu replies in an irritated tone, 'So what? Can't people go to Italy any longer?' The two neighbors redirect their attention to the match while Sandu sits quietly between them. After a little while, he says, 'I think she was a very OK girl'. His host now agrees with him, which makes Sandu react sharply, 'I see you know. She was a whore because she was going to Italy. And because she was a whore, she deserved to be killed...Are you a whore if you go to Italy?' They argue over their personal views on the possible circumstances of the girl's death, without reaching a consensus. The two neighbors' prejudiced opinions of young women like the victim relates to a grim period in the early years of the economic transition in Romania after the fall of the communist regime when lots of young women left for the West, with hopes for a better life, but often had to prostitute themselves to survive there or fell victims to human trafficking organizations.

TECHNOLOGY Matei's passion for computer devices and the developed technical vocabulary he uses to describe their functions stand in contrast to his parents' outdated knowledge of such things. Technology is the excuse Vali uses to insinuate himself in Sandu's life more closely. A techno geek, Vali impresses Olga with his knowledge, and, as a result, she entrusts him with the purchase of some extra hardware Matei needs for an update of his computer. When

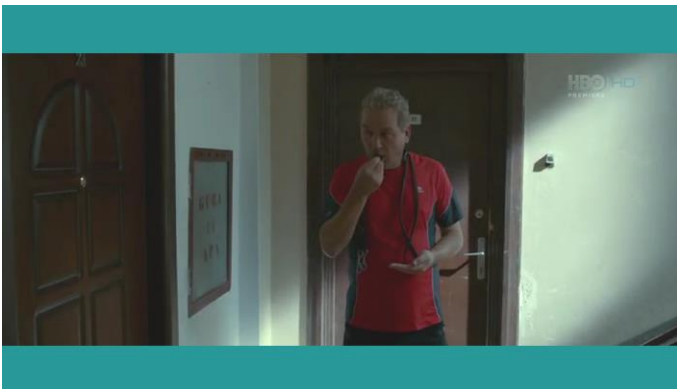
Vali explains the technical details of the product to Sandu and Olga, the two look puzzled and at a loss for words. Olga admits that she 'needs to write everything down' because she will not be able to remember them. Similarly, Sandu changes the subject because he cannot keep up with Matei's detailed technical description of a gaming mouse. Realizing that her son shows too much interest in Laura's social network page, Olga suggests forbidding him to use technology for a while as he sounds 'too overexcited' and needs a break to calm down. Matei is the type of teenager who overuses technology via computer games and social media, but lacks the emotional maturity to tackle disturbing content like the murder speculations surrounding Laura's death, which may be the cause of his nightmare at the end of the movie.

NIGHTMARE The theme of nightmare is introduced at the end of the movie when Matei suddenly wakes up from a bad dream, confused about reality and behaving as if in one of his computer games. Concerned about his son, Sandu and Olga gently try to comfort him and take him to their bedroom to sleep with them over night. Sandu switches the light off, but Matei keeps sleep-talking, 'The password...You, moron... My name is Patrascu... Patrascu.' Matei's nightmare comes right after Sandu leaves the invoice for his service in Vali's postbox, which he hopes will mean he will never have to see him again and that his life can go back to normal. Matei's nightmare right at the end of the movie leaves the story without a certain resolution, the characters' fate undetermined and unanswered questions open for the viewers' further interpretation. As hard as Sandu may try to go on with his work routine and family life as he does before Matei's nightmare, he is clearly in a crisis of conscience, impossible to ease by just cutting any interaction off with Vali. Matei's nightmare has a symbolical value, implying that the nature of the secret Sandu keeps is too heavy for him to go on with his routine as if nothing happened. The implied conclusion of the movie is that Sandu's life is most likely to turn into a nightmare under the burden of such secret.

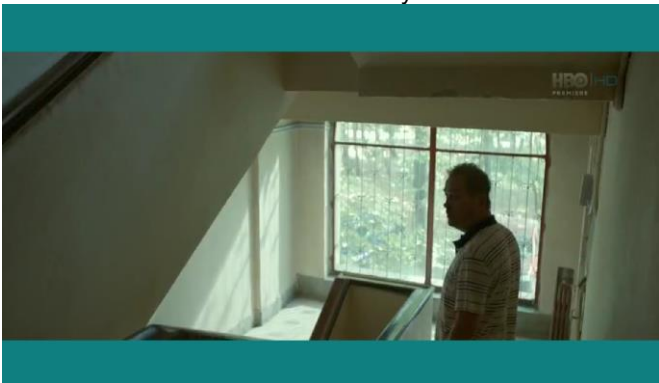
SCENES

WITNESS

Overhearing a domestic fight On the way to his flat, Sandu hears his neighbor, Laura, urging someone to leave her alone. He lingers a little longer by Laura's door when another neighbor, Vali, comes out and locks her up inside. Sandu puts the leash on Jerry to go upstairs, and Vali follows him for a few steps, but then returns to Laura's flat. Laura can be heard call Vali 'an idiot' as he unlocks the door. Matei wipes Jerry's feet while Sandu gets ready for work.. Sandu shows his son the walking app to boast about the six kilometers he has run that morning, reminds Matei to give Jerry some food later, and then says goodbye for the day.



On the way to work Sandu passes by Laura's flat and can still hear screams and shouting in there. He stops to listen for a few seconds on his way downstairs.



At the Vehicle Registration Office Sandu meets a client at the Vehicle Registration Office and advises him on the registration procedure stages, the required documents and the registration fee. Sandu reassures his client that he will be there to help, offering to pay the fee unless he has got cash, and saying that they will sort the expenses out at the end. Sandu hands his clients' documents to a registration clerk when his wife, Olga, calls him. He gives her some details about another client he wants her to take over. In the meanwhile, his second phone rings, and Sandu tells that client that his wife will meet him in a few minutes to give him his vehicle registration plates.

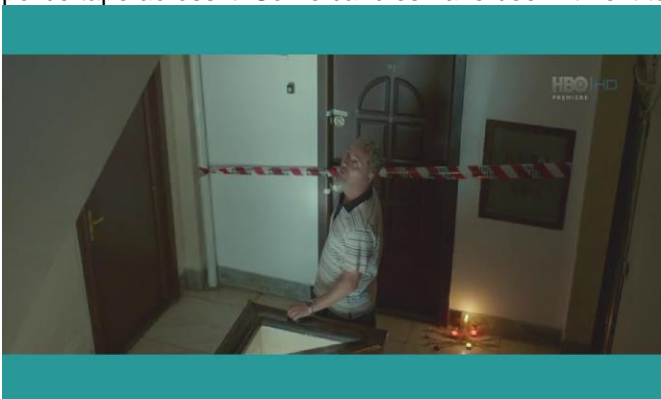


NEWS

Shocking news Sandu drives his first client's car to a meeting point in town when he gets a phone call from Olga, who breaks a piece of news to him. Visibly troubled, Sandu asks Olga 'if they found out who did it' and tells her not to allow Matei to go out that day. He meets his client to return his vehicle, car keys and documents.



A macabre sight Sandu runs into two neighbors outside his block of flats and asks them if there is any news. The two men look shocked and say that there is no lead to what happened. Sandu stops by Laura's flat door which has a police tape across it. Some candles have been lit next to it.



Back home Sandu enters the flat, calling Olga's name, but she is not at home. Matei breaks the news of Laura's death to his father and tells him that the neighbors' rumors go about a possible murder as she was found with her skull cracked. Matei shows him Laura's Facebook page and reads her last post about her upcoming trip to Italy. Sandu asks his son to close the page and see to his own things.



Looking for Olga Sandu goes looking for his wife and finds her on the ground floor of the block of flats, talking to a neighbor. Sandu asks her where she has been because, in her absence, Matei has checked 'crazy things' out on the internet. Olga and the neighbor tell him that Laura's death may have been an accident. The neighbor says that she knows that from another neighbor, who was around when the police came.



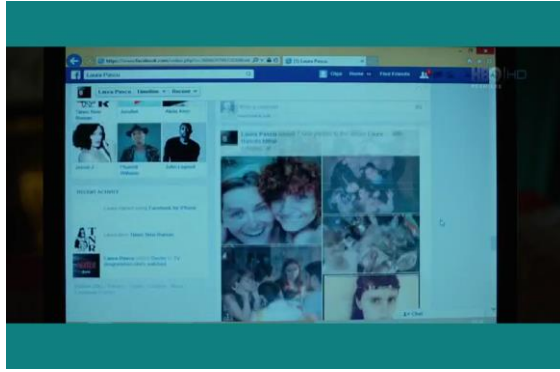
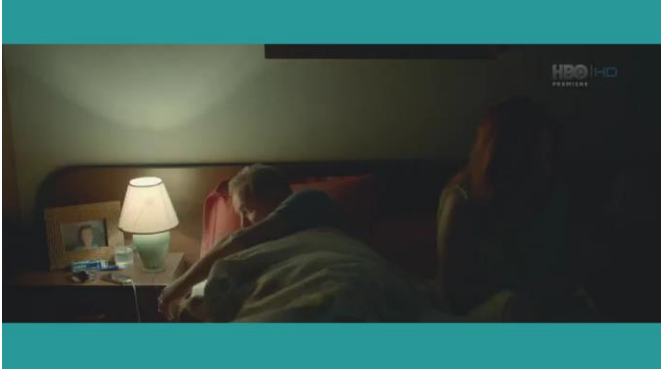
Dinner time Olga gets dinner ready while Sandu drinks a beer even though he was supposed to be on a diet, as she reminds him. They share a cigarette and chat a little about some clients when Matei says that Laura was found naked. Olga threatens that she will 'cut his internet access off'. She calls Matei for dinner whereas Sandu is no longer hungry and decides to take Jerry out for a walk.



A visit from the police Manescu, a police chief-inspector comes to ask Olga and Sandu some questions about their dead neighbor, but talks with each of them privately. Sandu deliberately lies to the police officer, that he has never seen Laura accompanied by someone else than her sister and that he cannot remember anything worth mentioning.



Sleep problems Olga returns from the bathroom and finds Sandu up. Sandu switches the lamp off, and Olga tells him that she cannot stop thinking about Laura and her tragic end at such a young age. Sandu cannot sleep, so he gets out of bed and goes to his laptop. He spends some time checking Laura's Facebook photos and posts out.



Taking Jerry to a dog competition Sandu sends Matei back home to fetch two caps. While waiting for his son, Sandu looks out of the window and notices Vali standing by a yellow car outside the block entrance. As Sandu and Matei head to the car, Vali greets them. Sandu greets him back distantly while Matei tells Vali that they are taking Jerry to a dog competition.



At the dog competition Sandu has just bought coke and water and waits for Matei to return. After some time of smoking and deep thinking, he starts looking around for Matei. Sandu finds his son still showcasing Jerry in front of a referee.



Sandu's mom Sandu is at his mother's house and helps her put the curtains up. She says she is happy to have him to herself even only for chores like that. Before they leave the house, she tells him to take the plate of vanilla cream cake she has made for him. Sandu moans that his diet will be ruined.



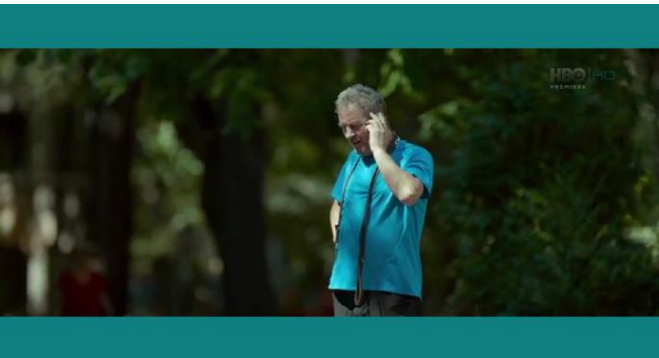
Vali's request Sandu and his mom enter the block of flats when Vali suddenly turns up behind them, saying that he needs Sandu's advice on a matter. Sandu dismisses him on the grounds that he is with his family, but Vali insists and follows him upstairs closely. Vali wants Sandu to help him register his car from an individual to a legal entity, which Sandu accepts reluctantly.



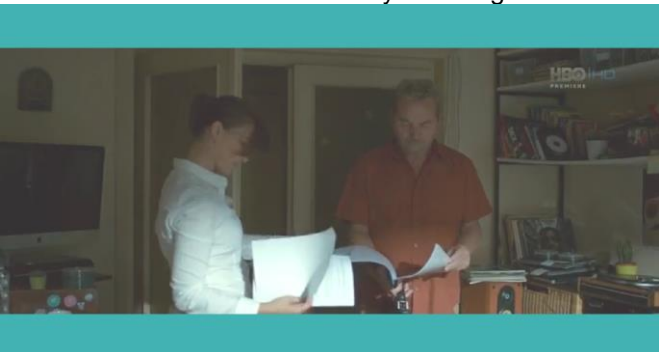
Olga's birthday party Sandu's mother gives Olga a bunch of flowers and wishes her happy birthday. Two of Olga and Sandu's friends are also there for the occasion. A little later, Sandu wonders if Olga could take over Manasan [one of their clients] for him because he has promised their neighbor Vali to help him with his car registration.



Vali calls Sandu jogs in the park, followed by Jerry when he receives a phone call from Vali, who reminds him about their meeting. Sandu says he has not forgotten about it, but that it is just 8.10 am, and that he will go pick up his documents in about an hour.



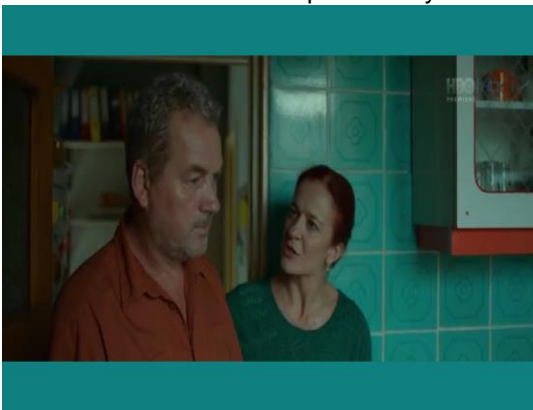
At Vali's place After some time knocking on Vali's flat door, his wife opens it and invites Sandu in. She looks for the car documents and gives them to Sandu, saying that Vali can not join him because he feels sick. Sandu is surprised to hear it since Vali seemed fine when he called him half an hour before, but his wife answers that Vali could not have called him because they were together then.



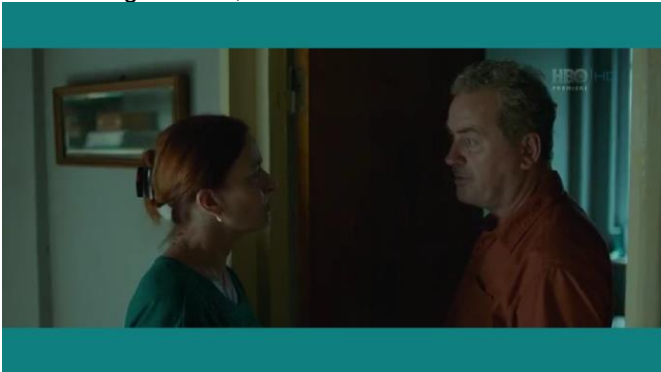
Administrative work Sandu fills out forms at the Vehicle Registration Office and takes his clients' documents, including Vali's, to one of the registration desks. The clerk checks the clients' records in the system and tells Sandu that Vali has three unpaid traffic tickets. Sandu goes to take some cash out to pay the fines and calls Vali to hold him accountable.



An unexpected guest Sandu returns home is visibly upset to find Vali eating in the kitchen and chatting with Olga. As Sandu makes himself a coffee, Vali hands him an envelope with money, apologizing for the traffic tickets. Sandu refuses to take the envelope and says that they will sort all the financial matters out after registration.



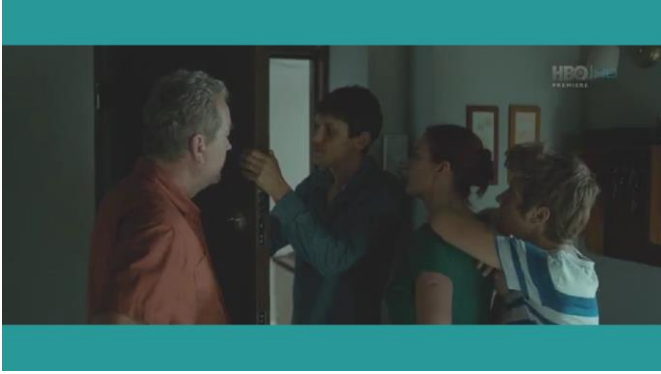
A word aside Sandu asks Matei to tell his mom to come in the hallway. Olga gets there and Sandu scolds her for having invited Vali to eat, but she says she did not. She explains to Sandu that she found Vali together with Matei when she got home, and that when she called Matei to eat, Vali said he was hungry and she could not refuse.



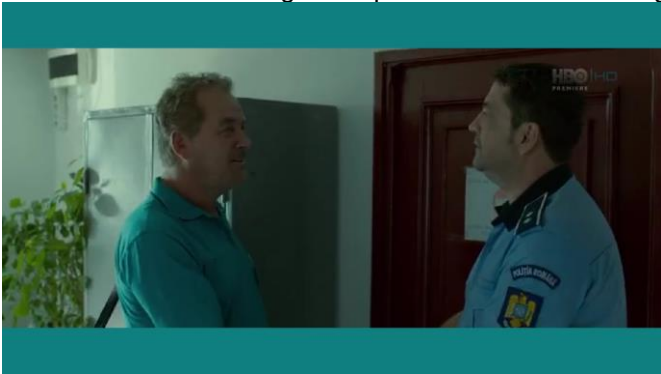
Vali's at home again Vali sets up the connections for Matei to be able to play his computer games on the smart TV in the living room. Olga is excited to see that her arm moves are detected within the computer game. Sandu watches the entire scene, helplessly fidgeting around and not knowing how to get Vali out of his house.



Vali's expert advice Before leaving, Vali gives Olga the technical details of the extra hardware she needs to buy, but she finds it difficult to remember and goes to fetch a piece of paper to write them down. In the meantime, Sandu reminds his that their appointment with the Vehicle Registration Office is in two days. Vali also notes down a hybrid option in case Olga cannot find the first one.



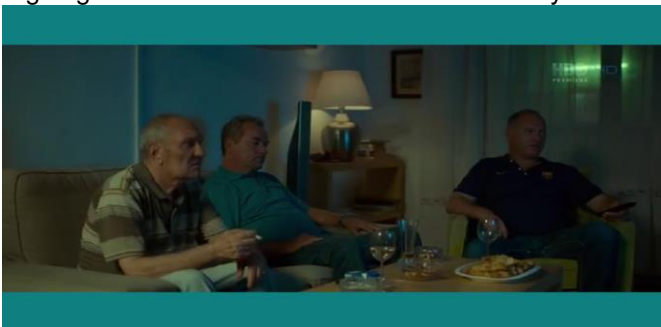
District 3 Police Station 10 Sandu parks his car by the police station, goes inside to talk to Police Commissioner Bolocan. Bolocan is pleasantly surprised by Sandu's unexpected visit. They briefly chat about their sons and how their lives have been since they last met a year before. Sandu tells Bolocan that he tried to call him a few days before and asks him if he has changed his phone number. Realizing that he has, Bolocan saves Sandu's phone number.



Running into Laura's sister The next morning Sandu runs into Laura's sister, who is by the postbox in the block of flats entrance hall, trying to take Laura's correspondence out. She asks Sandu for his key, but she cannot manage to open the door of the postbox. Sandu wants to help her, but without success either. He apologizes, offering his condolences on his way out. Laura's sister does not answer him back.



A heated dispute over a football match Sandu watches a football match with two neighbors. The older neighbor brings up Laura's name and asks Sandu if he has heard any news about the way she died. The younger one makes some nasty comments about Laura's reputation, which makes Sandu react strongly against him. They then start arguing about each other's version of what may have happened to Laura.



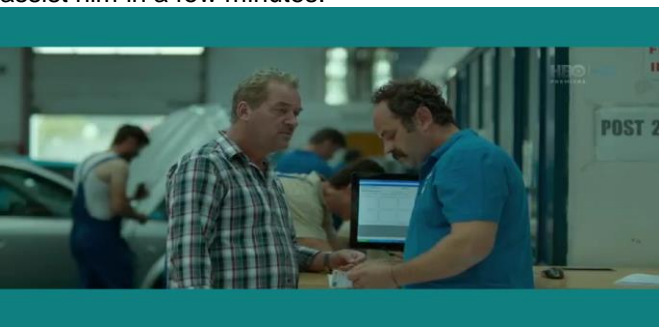
Vali does not show up Vali does not turn up for the appointment at the Vehicle Registration Office, so after waiting for some time, Sandu goes into a restaurant nearby to eat lunch. Vali calls him while he is eating and, after ignoring the call for a few seconds, Sandu picks it up, upset because Vali was late and they missed their turn. Sandu sets up a later meeting with Vali, and then calls another client.



An outright confrontation with Vali Vali drives in at the Vehicle Registration Office and Sandu points to which direction to take for the registration process. Sandu gets in the car and the tension between them increases as they wait in the queue. When they get to the check point, Vali suddenly turns towards Sandu and asks him what he is waiting for to say something to the police. Sandu calmly ignore Vali's questions and gets out of the car to give the employee in charge there Vali's car documents.



A new problem with Vali's The employee in charge with the computerized document check tells Sandu that Vali's car does not have a valid mandatory periodical technical inspection and that the registration is not possible without it. Sandu asks him to let it through and they will sort the problem out later, but the employee says he will do it only with a superior's approval. After a brief friendly chat with the engineer, Sandu receives his approval to have Vali's car registered. He then lets the employee know that the registration procedure can continue and goes to pay the fees. He gets a phone call from another client and he instructs him to drive in the queue, assuring him that he will come to assist him in a few minutes.



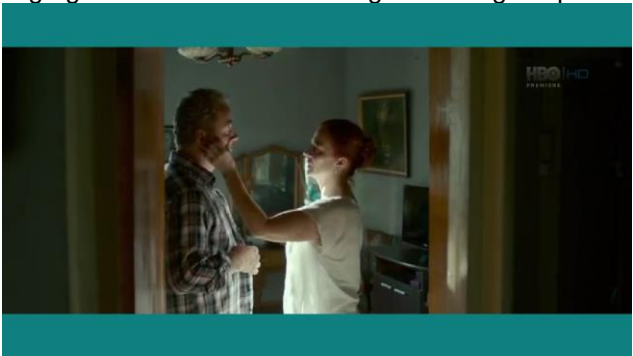
A warning to Vali Sandu warns Vali that he will be in real trouble if he ever comes near him or his family again.



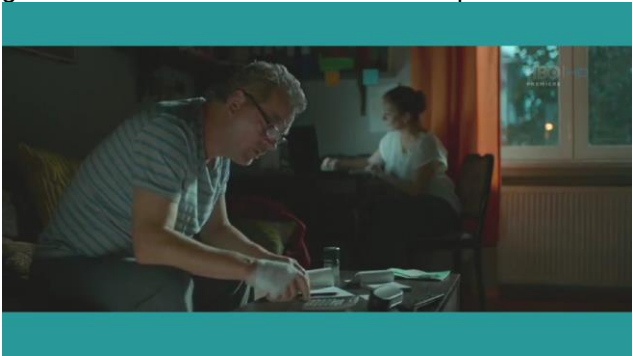
Sandu and Vali's fight Vali provokes Sandu with some sarcastic comments, and the latter loses his temper and slaps him. They start punching and hitting each other until Sandu knocks Vali down. Two employees rush to Vali's help, holding Sandu tight to make him stop kicking and punching him Vali.



Sandu's lie to Olga When Sandu gets home with bruises on his face and hands, Olga gets very worried and is surprised to hear that he got into a fight. Sandu says that the fight was started by some clients at the Vehicle Registration Office who were angry that he and Vali skipped the line, adding that Vali's state is even worse than his. Olga gives him some frozen vegetable bags to put on his wounds.



Vali's invoice Later in the evening, Olga works on the computer while Sandu fills in some receipts and invoices. She offers to write for him as his right hand is bandaged, but he says he is fine. He puts Vali's invoice in an envelope, goes downstairs and inserts it in Vali's postbox.



Matei's bad dream Late at night, Matei starts sleep talking and walking in the room all confused. Sandu is concerned about his son because his words do not make any sense. He gently holds Matei in his arms and then takes him to his bedroom to sleep with him and his mum. Olga and Sandu tuck their son in their bed, but when she switches the light off, Matei continues to sleep talk and repeats his family name twice.

