

# ***Asphalt Tango* / Asfalt Tango (1996)**

NAE CARANFIL

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### OVERVIEW

*Auteur* Nae Caranfil (b. 1960) is a highly acclaimed director, one of the first filmmakers of the Romanian New Wave that emerged right after the fall of Ceausescu's totalitarian regime in the 1990s. The son of a reputed film critic, Caranfil graduated as a film director from the Theatre and Film Institute in Bucharest in 1984. During his youth, he took music lessons and drew comic sketches, talents that he has used for writing the score and the script of most of his films. His tragic-comedies about the Western dream have gained him not only national but also international recognition: the Critics Award for *Sundays on Leave* (1993) at Montpellier Mediterranean Festival, Golden Bayard Award for Best Screenplay for *Dolce far niente* (1998) at Namur International Festival of French-Speaking Film, and several accolades for *Filantropica (Philanthropy)*, 2002). His other productions are *Asphalt Tango* (1996), *The Rest is Silence* (2007), for which he received a Gopo Award (a highly prestigious national award in Romania, similar to the Academy Awards in the US), *Closer to the Moon* (2013) and *6.9 on the Richter Scale* (2016).

*Film Asphalt Tango* is a Romanian – French co-production released in 1996, starring, among some of the most praised screen actors in Romania, Charlotte Rampling, the winner of numerous prestigious film industry awards (e.g., Honorary Golden Bear, Honorary César, European Film Awards, Boston Society of Film Critics Awards) and an Oscar nominee. Rampling plays Marion, the French artistic manager who comes to Romania for the young dancers recruited for her by Mr. Gigi. Although dubbed as a comedy, the movie also subtly portrays the grim reality and chaos of Romania's first democratic years after the fall of Ceausescu's regime. Between 1996 and 1997, the Romanian Filmmakers Union gave the movie awards for the Best Director, Montage and for Best Supporting male actors (Constantin Cotimanis as the bus driver and Florin Calinescu as Mr. Gigi).

*Background* Critics have found Caranfil's movie somewhat 'flippant'. In one of his interviews, Caranfil admits to having sensed his critics' disappointment with this film through which 'he was expected to reconfirm' his directorial skills. He defends his 'seemingly simplistic' vision by saying that he made the decision to make a comedy and to leave the serious elements in the background in a deliberate way. Caranfil describes his movie as a 'living mirror', a documentary which attests to the difficulties of the transition period of Romania in the 1990s, and the clash between two different sets of values: traditionalist (Andrei's character) and modernist (Marion's character).

The association of 'asphalt' and 'tango' in the title suggests that this conflict occurs not only on the level of principles, but also on a concrete plane: the 'asphalt' refers to the road (most of the scenes are filmed on the road) and the 'tango' refers to personal feuds, a dance between winners and losers, with no possibility of compromise, as shown in the final scene, with a direct confrontation between Andrei and Marion.

### CINEMATIC NARRATION

*Asphalt Tango* is a road movie. The characters' different quests (for identity, wealth, adventure) stand at the core of the action. The rudimentary old bus taking the girls to Paris is a symbol of their quest, but also of the lack of modern roads and means of transport at the time. The intro of the movie is a brief scene from an opera excerpt of Verdi's Hebrew Slave Chorus, followed by some window mannequins, a metaphor for the enslavement and objectification of the young women recruited to work in France. The camera is hardly ever static: the bus journey, Andrei's race after the bus in a stolen taxi, then on a bike, the police chasing the bus first, and then, Andrei. This helps create the 'on the road' effect as well as a sense of suspense and viewer anticipation.

### SYNOPSIS

A group of eleven young beautiful women embark on a bus that will take them to Paris, France, where they have been contracted to perform as dancers in the entertainment industry. Apart from the bus driver, they travel together with their impresario, Mr. Gigi, and Marion, the French artistic manager, who has come to Romania to oversee things. Their journey towards the border is difficult because of the poor state of the bus which is old, lacks air conditioning and has uncomfortable seats. One of the girls, Dora, leaves a farewell letter to her husband, Andrei, but, instead of accepting her decision, he immediately starts a race to catch up with the bus and make his wife change her mind about the job offer in Paris. Impressed with her husband's obstinate attempts to talk to her, Dora decides to give Andrei a chance and goes to his room on the final night before crossing the border. She finds him drunk in his bed and surrounded by her scantily clad colleagues; she runs away disappointed, which turns out to have been Marion's plan to ruin his

chances of getting his wife back. The next morning, as the police have just arrived at the hotel looking for him, Andrei steals a bike to follow the bus. He gets arrested while the bus crosses the border, with his wife watching the scene together with Marion from the rear window.

## MAIN CHARACTERS

<b>Andrei Lungu</b>	Andrei works as a mechanic in a car repair shop.
<b>Dora Lungu</b>	Dora is Andrei's wife and a ballerina at the Opera.
<b>Marion</b>	Marion is a French artistic manager.
<b>Mr. Gigi</b>	Mr. Gigi recruits young women for the entertainment industry abroad.
<b>The bus driver</b>	He is a man who collaborates with Mr. Gigi for the transport of the women to Paris.
<b>Felicia</b>	Felicia is a girl who decides to speak only in French.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### **Andrei**

Andrei is a hardworking man, whose deep love for his wife, Dora, and obstinate pursuit to make her change her mind about her work contract in France, reveals not only his kind-hearted and dependable nature, but also his sense of adventure and unfailing belief in his life-principles.

*Obstinate* Andrei's unfailing determination is reflected in his chasing Dora's bus till it crosses the border. In spite of Mr. Gigi's machinations, the driver's physically stopping him from getting on 'his bus' and Dora's refusal to talk to him, Andrei does not give up. He continues to try to convince Dora to get off the bus and hear him out until he gets arrested by the police at the end of the movie.

*Brave* Andrei gets involved in a series of adventurous events, which also test his courage. One of the most illustrative examples of his bravery happens during the gas station scene when he is told that the station has run out of gas and hears Felicia's screams for help. After receiving several punches from the two thugs, Andrei takes a cigarette lighter out of his pocket and threatens to blow the gas station unless Felicia is released.

*Idealistic* Andrei's unwavering faith in the institution of marriage in spite of his wife's refusal to talk to him shows his idealist side. Andrei remains fully committed to his 'for better or worse' wedding vows and cannot accept that his wife has not been tricked into signing a dubious contract.

### **Marion**

Marion is a French businesswoman with a serious, self-assertive attitude and an air of superiority. She is intelligent and quickly figures out the 'strange' way things stand in Romania. She shows no sympathy and manipulates things to her own convenience.

*Distant* Marion displays a rather cold non-verbal body language, and keeps her distance from the rest of the characters. For her, the girls are just business. As soon as she meets them, she callously instructs them to respect the contract, work hard, take care of their bodies, and remember that they have been chosen only because they are 'cheaper'.

*Authoritative* Marion wields her authority through her position as an employer as well as her foreign nationality in a country that has just opened to the Western world. Her authority is highlighted by her low, unemotional tone, which gets demanding when the situation requires it. For example, on realizing that hardly any of the girls understands French, she immediately asks Mr. Gigi for an explanation and accuses him of not respecting his part of the contract.

*Shrewd* Marion's shrewd character becomes most evident when she manipulates Dora's colleagues into going into Andrei's hotel room and putting him in a compromising position. Marion's wicked plan succeeds, and when confronted by Andrei, she faces him coldly. In tango steps, she tells him that she could not have allowed that his 'innocence' to 'change people's minds'.

### **Mr. Gigi**

Mr. Gigi is an opportunist, whose only concern is to make money, regardless of the method and those who may suffer in the process. He is a shrewd flatterer with foreigners like Marion because he makes a lot of easy money at their expense.

*Unscrupulous* Mr. Gigi recruits young Romanian women to work in the entertainment industry abroad. When, for instance, Marion holds him accountable for the girls' very poor knowledge of French, he immediately replies that it is not his fault that they pretended to speak the language by 'reciting from Baudelaire'. This implicitly points to the fact that he had the girls sign the contract blindly, deliberately omitting to give them a realistic picture of their job

requirements.

*Servile* Mr. Gigi displays a sycophantic attitude towards Marion and smooth talks her in most of their interactions. When he greets Marion before boarding the bus, for example, he tells her that she looks wonderful that day and kisses her hand. He then immediately takes a protective stance when a boy approaches her and asks her if she has got some German marks or US dollars to exchange. His face expression and grimaces often contrast with the soft tone he uses to respond to Marion's reproaches.

*Unsympathetic* Mr. Gigi takes no pity on Andrei's desperate attempts to speak to his wife and change her mind. On the contrary, he does everything he can to prevent that from happening. He even calls the police to report that Andrei is mentally ill and harassing the entire bus. Then he pays some thugs at a gas station to beat him up. Moreover, he makes indecent proposals to Dora, thus showing his complete lack of sympathy for the couple.

## THEMES

### SOCIETY

**VALUES** Two opposing sets of values—the traditionalist versus the modern one—come under scrutiny in Caranfil's movie. On the one side, there is Andrei, who still believes in hard work, good morals and full commitment to his family. On the other side, there is his wife, Dora, who cannot find her happiness at home any longer and dreams about a new life in Paris. As a result, one day she packs up and leaves home while Andrei is at work despite the fact that she still loves him and he is 'the kind of man that any woman would wish', as she admits in her goodbye letter to him. A rather cynical but quite accurate sketch of the depreciation of values in the newly democratic Romanian society is given by the bus driver while having his bus checked by Andrei at the service station. The bus driver describes the new reality, in which more and more Romanians have embraced dubious morals and ferocious ambitions. Embittered and nostalgic, the driver regrets Ceausescu's death and concludes that he 'should not have got himself shot dead' because now 'nobody wants to work anymore'. He continues his lamentation, saying everyone dreams of owning a business that will make them rich overnight, while beautiful women, like the ones he transports to Paris, leave the country only to become 'luxury prostitutes' abroad.

**FREEDOM** The early 1990s found Romania free from an authoritarian regime but plunged in a state of chaos and poverty. Caranfil's movie subtly highlights the idea that freedom in the absence of a firm set of laws and well-established values can lead to a society drifting chaotically, with catastrophic consequences for its citizens' lives. This is dramatised, for example, by the young women who imagine they have signed a contract to work as dancers in Paris and have no suspicion that they might end up as prostitutes there, as implied in the conversation between the bus driver and Andrei at the garage. In a frenzy to go abroad, one of the women on the bus even takes the initiative of having all the girls sign up for a union, which she thinks can fight for their rights and against exploitation. Her undertaking is, however, in stark contrast with the lack of reaction at Marion's cold tone when presenting the job requirements. Apart from Felicia, who seems to have learnt some set phrases in French, they can hardly understand the language of the country they are heading to, which implies that they will not be able to stand up for themselves, if necessary. All these young women behave as if liberated from their former domestic roles (Dora, from a 'happy' marriage, paradoxically), and now feel empowered to make their own decisions about how they want to live their lives. It is a freedom, however, that lacks reality.

**ENTERTAINMENT / SEX INDUSTRY AND WOMEN** Caranfil's movie gives an insight into a tendency in post-revolutionary Romania for self-delusion among young women, who think that they are given the chance of their life when signing work contracts with foreign agencies. In one of the nightclub girls' words, this is a golden opportunity to find a rich foreigner who will marry them and offer them a great life. Some girls in the group immediately become very friendly when they hear a man speaking a foreign language in their proximity. The grim unspoken reality of the time, however, is that women do not seem to understand that they are treated as mere tradable commodities, who have been chosen, as Marion puts it, only because they are 'cheaper' than those in other countries. Mr. Gigi almost always talks down to them and insults them deliberately as a form of intimidation. Similarly, the bus driver's remarks about these women are misogynistic, and full of sexual innuendos and derogatory generalizations. When he meets Mr. Gigi before departure, the driver asks him whether, besides the financial reward, he can also get any sexual favors from the girls on the way to Paris.

### RELATIONSHIPS

**LOVE** Caranfil's movie portrays a society cast adrift after the fall of communism, in which only love seems to have remained a beacon of hope. Andrei's stubborn chase of the bus taking his wife abroad highlights his abiding love for her. In her letter to him, Dora tells him that she loves him, too, but that she has to leave everything behind for the unique chance of working in France. As soon as he reads the letter, and bearing in mind the bus driver's remarks about the dubious fate of the women, Andrei starts a mad race to save his wife. Dora's colleagues gradually come to admire his desperate attempts to talk to his wife, and say to her that they wish that they had a man to love them like that. In the tango scene towards the end of the movie, even Marion admits to having been impressed by his commitment to his marriage and the powerful impact that such genuine feelings of love may have had on Dora if he

had succeeded in talking to her. Although the end of the movie shows Andrei handcuffed by the police while hopelessly watching the bus cross the border, his love for Dora inspires someone else to change her mind. Felicia, the girl who decided to 'forget' Romanian gets off the bus and waves at him from the other side of the road.

**MARRIAGE** In a society that experiences serious socio-economic difficulties and a fierce fight for survival during its transition years, marriage appears to have become an obsolete concept. The theme of marriage is mooted in the movie intro through a quote from Groucho Marx: 'Marriage is a wonderful institution, but who on earth would like to live in an institution?'

Andrei is the only character who still believes in this institution and remains faithful to his wedding vows from the beginning till the end of the movie. On the other hand, Dora's ambition is stronger than her love and her appreciation of her husband's personal qualities, and she abandons everything to fulfill her Western dream. The movie ends with Andrei's state of confusion generated by a flashback to his marriage ceremony, the police officers surrounding him, and the Dora's bus crossing the border. For a brief moment, reality and memory merge, and the priest handcuffs Andrei's and Dora's hands together. Back to reality, Andrei realizes that he is the only one who got handcuffed while Dora is still on the bus and watches the entire scene smiling. The handcuffs symbolize Andrei's mental entrapment in his idealistic view of marriage, and his inability to understand that it was his wife's decision to walk out of it.

## PSYCHOLOGY

**IDENTITY** Felicia's decision to speak only in French points to another main theme addressed in the movie: quest for identity. During the goodbye dinner she has with her family before departure, she suddenly switches to French and refuses to answer their questions in Romanian. As they look puzzled, she explains: 'I consider Romanian a dead language, and I'll do my best to forget it'. Felicia's rejection of her own identity and cultural appropriation of French highlights a widespread phenomenon at that time. In the early 1990s, there was a general association of the Western world with freedom, wealth and civilization. Many Romanians experienced an identity crisis at that time, when the patriotic pride inflicted by the communists in the national conscience for almost half a century seemed to have vanished along with the system, leaving behind, after the initial euphoria of the revolution, a deep gap between the backward, impoverished East and the modern, wealthy West. It is a gap that migrants like Felicia and Dora imagine that they can successfully overcome by 'forgetting' their language (the former's decision) or by cutting off all roots with their family (the latter's).

**LOSS** Another major theme addressed in the movie is loss. Caranfil highlights the idea of loss on the level of society through the characters' decisions, attitudes and interactions with one another, as well as through the inability of the state to tackle social problems. This latter condition is the case with the police officer who tells Andrei that he has no authority to solve his 'marital crisis', and refuses to investigate the girls' contracts more closely. One of the most illustrative examples of loss is Andrei's and Dora's break-up regardless of their love for each other. This points to a reality of the time when numerous families would have at least one member migrating to the West in the hope of finding a better life there. Dora gives that reason for her leaving Andrei 'like a thief', without telling him about her contract in France. In Caranfil's own words, 'The good guy loses the girl in the end', but the deeper meaning of such loss relates to the disintegration of a fundamental value in Andrei's life, that is, the family.

**DESIRE / TEMPTATION / QUEST** The theme of quest is highlighted in the movie through the characters' search for a better life. The girls view their work contract in France as a chance to liberate themselves from a tedious domestic life (as they most likely used to have before the fall of communism), become independent financially and have a wider range of professional opportunities. Dora leaves both her job as an opera ballerina and her loving husband to join the cabaret dancing group because 'she wants more from life', something that Andrei 'cannot give her'. On the other hand, unscrupulous people like Mr. Gigi, the bus driver, and ultimately, Marion, also look for easy ways to make money, and naïve girls like Dora and her colleagues are the perfect target. Interestingly, the state itself is in search for its lost authority. The most relevant example is the scene with the police officer who is watching an Arnold Schwarzenegger's film and imitating some of the actor's dramatic moves while listening over the phone to Mr. Gigi's complaints about Andrei's harassment. After the call, the police officer adopts a role similar to his movie hero and sets off in his car to find Andrei. When he does, however, he is immediately knocked out in one blow by the dubious businessman who was travelling with Andrei at that moment.

**SEXUAL DESIRE/ TEMPTATION** Caranfil addresses sexual desire as another major theme in his movie, and closely examines it in relation to women as objects of desire. Most of the scenes in which the group of the young women going to Paris appear show the frequent groping, harassment and innuendos they are subjected to by men. Dora's 'honest question'—'why do we always have to put up with such lame hints?'—in response to Mr. Gigi's lascivious attitude towards her sums it all up: women constantly 'have to endure' men's 'pathetic sexual advances'. The bus driver's question, right after he receives a financial incentive and the transport documents from Mr. Gigi, is also connected to the possibility of also being 'rewarded' with some sexual favors from the girls during their journey to Paris. Moreover, the driver keeps telling dirty jokes on the bus in the hope that he will draw the girls' attention to him. The tango scene between Marion and Andrei also hints at the sexual desire and tension that normally exists between the two dancing partners. In the movie, however, the tango is used as a metaphor for the clash between the two different worlds and values that Marion and Andrei represent.

## SCENES

**Preparing for departure** Dora celebrates her departure for France with her colleagues at the Opera House. One of her colleagues gives her a burlesque feather boa as a reminder of her native place when she performs on the Moulin Rouge stage in Paris. Somewhere else, a night club dancer cannot remove her bra while dancing on the stage. Her colleagues watch the scene behind the stage and laugh. They say that the prank should serve as a reminder of her Romanian roots for when she is in Paris. Another girl, Felicia, is having dinner with her family whom she shocks by refusing to speak to them in Romanian and answering their questions in French.



**An old bus ready for Paris** The bus driver asks Andrei, the mechanic, to make sure that the bus is ready for a long journey by midday. Using offensive language, he then refers to the current socio-economic instability in Romania, and tells Andrei that he is going to use the bus to take some high-class prostitutes to Paris.





**Boarding time** A group of young women are boarding the bus in the afternoon. Once on the bus, two of them start arguing whether or not to leave a window open since one of them wants to smoke. Mr. Gigi gets annoyed with them and urges them to calm down as he also sees Marion approaching the bus.



**Marion arrives** Marion cannot hide her disgust at the state of the bus and Mr. Gigi's way of greeting her by kissing her hand. She gets on the bus and reminds the girls that they have signed a two-year contract that they must respect. Realizing that not all the girls have understood what she said, she reproaches Mr. Gigi for having recruited girls who do not speak French.



**Dora's letter** In the meantime, Andrei comes back home from work only to find his wife letter through which she lets him know that she has signed a work contract and decided to try her luck in Paris, France. With the driver's words about the luxury prostitutes in mind, Andrei rushes out of his flat to find a taxi to catch up with the bus.



**Marion's concerns** One of the girls on the bus sits next to Dora and asks her to join the girls' union she is going to set up with the aim of defending their rights. Marion anxiously asks Mr. Gigi if the girls have read their contracts carefully as she has a feeling that there will be problems. He tries to reassure her, by saying that the girls are professionals. She expresses her doubt about that because her experience in the few days she has spent in 'this mad country' has shown her that Romanians tend to complicate even the simplest things.





**The police get involved** Andrei goes to the police station to report his wife's disappearance. He tells the police officers that his wife has been recruited by a prostitution agency. Andrei, together with two police officers, set off in search of the bus. The police car catches up with the bus and one of the officers orders the bus driver to pull over. Mr. Gigi explains to the police officer that the girls' contracts and long-term visas are legal because everything has been done through the French Embassy.



**Andrei's accusations** Andrei loses his temper and accuses Mr. Gigi of taking his wife to prostitute herself. Marion asks Mr. Gigi to translate for her. She then tells Andrei that the girls have been strictly hired for a cabaret show, and that she pays them to 'inspire and not satisfy the clients' desire'.





**Dora's refusal** Andrei insists on talking with his wife, but she briskly comes to the front of the bus, shouting that she won't see him. Marion advises Andrei that he should accept the situation and go back home. The police officer also says that there is no legal basis to solve a domestic crisis like his. The bus sets out again, with Andrei determined to continue to follow it.



**The chase** Andrei stops a taxi and tells the driver that he will pay any price for him to follow the yellow bus. The driver agrees but later notices his idol, Loredana, surrounded by fans in front of a building. He stops the car to get the singer's autograph, but gets into a conflict with her bodyguards. Pressed for time, Andrei drives away in the taxi.



**Marion's lesson** The bus has stopped for lunch and toilet break. While sitting at the same table with Dora and Mr. Gigi, Marion double-checks with Dora that she does not regret her decision. Marion notices Dora's discomfort at Mr. Gigi's flirtation, so she demonstrates to her how she should reject a man's sexual advances in the future without hurting his feelings.



**Chasing the bus** The bus is on the road, and Andrei catches up with it again. He tries to draw Dora's attention towards him, but she is sleeping. The bus driver notices the taxi in his side-view mirror and speeds up, but Andrei keeps driving and following the bus imperturbably.





**Dinner time** Marion, Mr. Gigi and the girls check into a hotel for the night. They are having dinner at the restaurant, with one of the girls getting very excited to hear a man next to their table ordering in French. Dora is sent a drink from someone who keeps his identity hidden behind a broadsheet newspaper. She applies Marion's teachings, and refuses it politely, asking for a business card.



**Shame** Dora realizes that the man who has sent her the drink is Andrei. When he reacts angrily at her for asking for his business card, she avoids looking at him and runs to hide in the hotel. Andrei follows her into the women's bathroom, but she will not show herself. Dora's colleagues threaten Andrei with a pepper spray. Marion also joins them in the bathroom and asks him to come out for a talk.



**The set-up** While Marion tries to clarify things with Andrei, a beggar approaches their table, looking for trouble. Andrei slaps the man several times, tightly holds one of his arms behind his back to force an apology to Marion, and then pushes him out of the dining terrace. Outside the restaurant, Andrei gives the man some money for pretending to be a beggar. The beggar knocks Andrei out and runs away with his wallet.



**The conversation** Marion gets in the taxi to thank Andrei for defending her from the beggar. After they talk, Marion realizes that the beggar scene has been just a set-up by Andrei in an attempt to impress Dora. The exchange their differing views on marriage and commitment. Marion advises Andrei to go home as his wife has a mind of her own and cannot be coerced into something against her will.





**Mr. Gigi's visit** Mr. Gigi pays Dora a visit in her room to tell her that he is really fond of her and that he could promote her if she was 'a smart girl' and treated him 'nicely'. Dora remains calm and shocks Mr. Gigi with her question about why women have to endure that kind of treatment from men. She then rejects him and tells him that his pathetic speech could never win a woman's heart.



**Mr. Gigi's threats** The next day, everyone gets on the bus quietly so as not to wake up Andrei. However, as they are getting ready to go, Andrei also starts the engine of the taxi. Mr. Gigi angrily shouts at Andrei, ordering him to leave them alone. Seeing that his attempt to intimidate Andrei is in vain, Mr. Gigi calls the police and tells the officer on duty that they have been followed and harassed by a madman in a black taxi.



**At the police station** Three policemen bring the taxi driver in the on-call officer's office, accusing the man of aggressive behavior at the railway station. When the taxi driver complains that his taxi has been stolen, the officer realizes that the car is the same as the one reported by Mr. Gigi over the phone.



**A new attempt** The bus stops by a corn field for a brief toilet break. Andrei, who has arrived there at the same time, tries to talk to Dora again but without success. When he loses his temper and tries to get on the bus, the bus driver pushes him away, reminding him that no one can get on his bus without his permission.



**The businessman** A man dressed up in a business suit approaches, shouting for a taxi to Oradea (about ten kilometers east of Romania's border with Hungary). Andrei needs money so he agrees to give him a ride. Andrei reveals the reason of his chasing the bus, but the businessman advises him to stop since his wife is not being held against her will. In the meantime, a police car draws near them and orders them to stop.





**Hit and run** In a moment of the police officer's inattention, the businessman takes a gun out of his coat to threaten the officer and knocks him out. He leaves the place in the police car. Shocked by the unexpected turn of the events, Andrei apologizes to the lieutenant lying on the road unconscious and drives away in the black taxi.



**Paying for the ride** A little later, the businessman stops Andrei's car on the road and hands Felicia—whom he must have pretended to place under arrest by using the police officer's stolen ID and car—over to him as his way of paying him for the ride. Andrei apologizes for the misunderstanding but takes Felicia as a hostage in his car. He reassures Felicia that nothing bad will happen to her if she follows his instructions.





**Marion's fury** Marion is furious with Mr. Gigi because she cannot understand why one of her girls has been taken by what she thinks is a police officer. Mr. Gigi tries to calm her down and tells her that he knows how to get Felicia back as soon as he sees the black taxi stopping because it has run out of gas.



**At the gas station** Mr. Gigi bribes three men hanging out together at the nearest gas station to 'take care' of Andrei. When Andrei and Felicia arrive, two of the men start punching him, while the third one tries to rape Felicia in the backroom. Andrei lights up a cigarette lighter, threatening to blow everything up unless the girl is released. The men step back, Felicia gets in the car while Andrei fills up the tank and drives away.



**Andrei's terms of negotiation** To Mr. Gigi's despair, and the girls' growing admiration for Andrei's determination to get his wife back, the taxi draws near the bus again. Marion stops the bus and gets in the taxi to talk to Andrei. He proposes a deal: in exchange for Felicia, the girls must check in at a hotel in Oradea for one night before they cross the border.





**At the hotel** Marion gives Andrei the key to his room in a four-star hotel, as her gift to him. The girls are excited to see Felicia join the group again. At the dinner table, when Dora is not there, Marion asks the girls to tempt Andrei and prove to him that he is no different than other men and that he is vulnerable to women's charm, too.



**A game of seduction** Drinking champagne in his room, Andrei calls reception to give Dora the message that he wants to talk to her for the last time. Felicia, soon followed by the other girls, comes to Andrei's room. They start dancing seductively while he is drinking champagne. Dora sees the entire scene and rushes to her room, disappointed in him.



**Andrei's anger** Andrei realizes that the girls' act was Marion's set-up, so he runs full of rage to find her. He yells at her door to come out to talk and, in the absence of her response, tries to knock her door down with his feet. Mr. Gigi shouts at him to stop because Marion is not in her room.



**The tango** Andrei finds Marion waiting for him on the stage in the restaurant. In a moment of exasperation, he almost strangles her, blaming her for having ruined his life. In tango moves, Marion explains to Andrei that she could not have allowed him to win because his 'innocence makes people doubt their choices'.





**The next day** Andrei is disillusioned when he finds out that the girls left the hotel early in the morning. The receptionist encourages him to try to catch up with them because the border crossing times are long on weekends. As Andrei comes out of the hotel, he sees some policemen near the taxi, so he takes a bike leaning against a wall and continues his pursuit.



**At the border** Police officers arrest Andrei by the border while Marion and Dora watch the scene from the rear window of the bus. The bus crosses the border as one of the officers is reading aloud the offences he is charged with. Before getting in the police car, Andrei notices Felicia sitting on her suitcase and waving at him from the other side of the road.

