

# CRAZY DAY

A Film by Andrea Maria Dusl

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## EXPOSÉ 2.0e - WHO and WHERE

Our story takes place on one single day, at one single location. A hotel. The characters are the people at the hotel: the guests, the staff, the visitors and the suppliers. It is a completely normal hotel – at a quite abnormal time. Abnormal? Absolutely abnormal. It is the beginning of **APRIL 2003**. An insane day. In **BAGHDAD**. The American ground forces are 50 kilometres away from the city. Outside, in front of the **HOTEL PALESTINE** in downtown Baghdad, American shells are raining down from the skies – and inside, news is being made. Along with many other things which cause pain. For lust and pain are blood-brothers.

The character who is the centre of our attention in this hotel full of reporters and photographers and television people is **LILLY**. Lilly is a top journalist for a major German TV station, a determined, courageous, highly charged and very, very elegant woman. 42 years old, intelligent, experienced and educated. She speaks several languages. Lilly has two daughters in Rome and a very nice husband, but Lilly has a problem. She can't get enough: not enough of war, information, attention or love. Lilly's problem: she needs to get out into the world, out where history is being made and stories are being written. Up close and personal with the misery and despair, right where the agony is real. Close to the flame. Too close to the flame.

**NINA** is 28, a German photographer working for Reuters. A fragile, girlish woman from a good family; her parents are both actors. Nina wanted to be an actor too, but it turned out that she wasn't talented enough. "I'm too ugly to be in a film," is the lie that Nina tells herself to justify this. In fact, Nina is not at all ugly. Nina is in the war because nobody has ever thought her capable of anything. And nothing could frighten Nina more than being in a war. What is Nina really looking for? Perhaps someone who accepts her with all her fragility. Someone she

would not need to prove anything to.

Our story focuses on these two people, on the despair triggered inside them by their encounter, and on the burning lust that cannot be quashed, not even by the war. **CRAZY DAY** also tells the stories of other protagonists:

**TORE**, 52, is a Swedish radio reporter, a loving father and a warm-hearted man with a tragic passion for **TMARA**, the daughter of the cook. She is eight years old, an overexcited little creature.

**AIQUE**, 39, is a journalist for El Pais, hysterical and loud. He has two great passions: lying and eating. His informant is **AHMED**, a depressive cook with no talent who learned his trade in the best hotels of Kuwait and can deal with anything at all... except for the weird demands of these crazy people from the West.

In addition to these six people, their relationships and entanglements, there are dozens of other western journalists, sound engineers and cameramen in the **HOTEL PALESTINE**, along with reporters, writers and photographers. An Iraqi **HOTEL PORTER** who loves ABBA, two **ITALIANS** who want to buy Saddam's famous mosaic of George Bush senior. Then there is the **PAINTER** who has assembled the biggest collection of Saddam Hussein portraits in history and is exhibiting them in the hotel; he can complain about a lot, but not the number of visitors he gets.

There are drivers and interpreters, spies and informers for the Iraqi secret police, water merchants and cigarette dealers, generator salesmen, the families of the hotel staff – who are accommodated in the underground garage – and western orientated business people with their families, who have rented a few rooms here in the eye of the storm because they hope this will put them in a better position to survive the war. And there are two very, very lonely men who report back to their superiors about events in the hotel itself. Bizarrely enough, their rooms are next door to each other: an Iraqi and an American military intelligence officer.

There is plenty of work here, plenty of boredom, fear, hard-boiled posturing – and lust. The lust to make up stories, experience adventures, witness horrors, participate in war and sample sensual delights, both forbidden and allowed. Life in this place knows no bounds. Crazy Day will be a tragicomedy, an ensemble film. It is set in the war, but it is not about war.

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## EXPOSÉ 2.0e

Baghdad. April 2003. The American ground forces are 50 kilometres from the city. The entrance to the Hotel Palestine has been reinforced with sandbags. Dust the colour of ochre is everywhere. The windows of the hotel lobby, built in 1960s style, are grimy; they have not been cleaned since the war began. An Arab girl called **TMARA** is standing in front of the hotel; she is eight years old, a fragile creature with dark black hair and wide-open, precocious eyes, wearing a colourful but worn dress and no veil. The girl takes a drag on her cigarette, slowly and with great relish, as if she were a 40-year-old gas station attendant. In her tiny left hand she is clutching a Zippo lighter and a pack of Lucky Strikes. Now there is the sound of sirens, accompanied by the rattle of Iraqi anti-aircraft fire. We hear the dull thuds of bombs hitting the ground. The Arab girl calmly inhales on her grotesque, oversized cigarette. Then she stubs it out on her sandals, turns round and strolls towards the entrance of the hotel.

## CRAZY DAY

The Swedish radio reporter **TORE**, 52, is sitting in the greasy leather armchair in the lobby of the hotel: he is balding, with a small pot belly and a pasty complexion. Tore is yelling into his mobile phone, reading from his manuscript. Next to him there are two government officials. Tore's mobile crackles. Tore: "American tanks? There aren't any goddamn American tanks here. Here it's raining hot metal. That's American enough." The Iraqi government officials are taking notes. Tore gazes after Tmara, de Arab girl. She gives him a contemptuous glance.

**LILLY**, 42 years old, a determined, highly charged and very, very elegant woman, is standing in front of the mirrored wall in the ladies' toilet, talking on her mobile phone and trying to apply mascara at the same time. Lilly has a restless, almost manic air about her as she

organises her life as top reporter for a major German TV station.

**AHMED**, 45, is standing in his spotless kitchen; he has an Arab moustache and a great deal of black hair, on his arms as well as his head. He is preparing lunch for the hotel guests. He takes a case of tinned meat out of the storeroom, along with six packs of noodles. Tmara, the little girl we saw earlier, starts dragging canisters of water into the kitchen. With a stoic expression Ahmed begins opening the tins of meat, one by one.

**AIQUE**, 38, a reporter for a Spanish daily paper, is sitting at the bar in the lobby along with several other journalists. Aique is telling them an elaborate recipe with complicated ingredients, speaking extremely fast in Hispano-French Lingo. Somebody mentions that the secret police are looking for satellite phones, because the Saddam clan needs them to flee the country. An Italian journalist blushes. Someone else says he wants to buy the famous mosaic with the portrait of George Bush senior, which Saddam Hussein had installed in a neighbouring hotel for guests to wipe their feet on. It would make a fine souvenir.

Once again we hear sirens and the chatter of anti-aircraft fire, this time closer. **NINA**, 28, is standing at the reception desk, checking in. She is a fragile, girlish figure, with three Nikons hanging around her neck – but no bullet-proof vest. And apart from a sports bag the only luggage Nina has consists of photographic equipment. Lilly stops and gazes at Nina, fascinated by her delicate, timid hands, her movements which are both fragile and strong.

There is a subterranean rumble: a cruise missile has struck nearby. The shockwave brings a cloud of dust through the open hotel doors, and the empty postcard stand falls over. Lilly wipes the dust from her face and finds herself gazing into two big, glistening eyes.

"I'm Nina" says Nina.

"Lilly", says Lilly, "ARD". – "Is everything all right? Is it always like this? All these bombs, all this dust?" Nina's naive concern leaves Lilly speechless. "See you around," said Nina, hauling her luggage to the lift. She presses the button to summon the lift – naturally, in vain. Out of Order. War.

Tore is calling his family back in Sweden. He talks to his daughter about her dolls' house, tells everyone there is lots of thunder here. All

these thunderstorms in Baghdad, he lies.

In front of the hotel. The steady rattle of generators. A babble of voices, in many languages, all speaking slowly and steadily. Lined up like pearls on a chain, the television reporters are all facing the cameras. One spotlight after another. In the background there is the huge statue of Saddam. One of the reporters is Lilly. Clutching a microphone, she is reporting about life in the hotel: during the day there are isolated hits from missiles, during the night the air raids. But despite this, the hotel has taken on a lethargic aspect. A quiet spot in the eye of the storm. Because, Lilly assumes, the Americans are hardly going to bomb the Hotel Palestine, where all the international television crews are holed up. Lilly injects a note of humour by telling the viewers about Ahmed the cook, who does his very best to conjure up new dishes – but all he ever has at his disposal are the same two ingredients. She mentions all the official Saddam lookalikes who will soon be out of a job. And she says everyone is just waiting for the ground troops to arrive; they can't be far away now.

An exhibition has been set up in a room off the lobby. A man with a moustache looks very isolated as he guards several dozen portraits. He is the official Saddam Hussein portrait artist. Nina gets some shots of the artist and his works. He bemoans his fate and is worried about what the future will hold for him.

One of the Italians hides something wrapped in silver foil inside a ventilation aperture, in a basement corridor. Tmara watches him as she walks past. She is carrying a basket of grass and leaves, and now she opens the fire door leading to the basement garage. Instead of cars, there are now families parked in here. Children are sleeping on sofas, camp beds and mattresses. People are cooking on gas stoves. The families of the hotel staff have moved in here. Tmara opens the door to a smaller cellar. There is a goat tied to a blue rope. Tmara feeds the goat.

The main restaurant in the hotel is almost empty: only a small number of tables have been set. At one of the tables we see Aique, the Spanish reporter, along with Canadians, Italians and two Danes. It is lunchtime. Aique complains to the waiter that the food is inedible. The waiter brings Ahmed out of the kitchen, who explains miserably that he has reached the limit of his culinary skills. Aique asked whether it is true that he once cooked in the Hyatt in Kuwait City. Yes, replies Ahmed. Did they only serve noodles with beef sauce there as well? Aique

suggests a recipe that involves a whole range of ingredients, spices and herbs. Ahmed does not have any of them in his kitchen. Aique requests Syrian lamb for dinner – it must be possible to get that in Baghdad, surely? Ahmed swallows. Difficult. Impossible, in fact. Aique hands him €400, and the others also contribute. Soon there is a considerable sum of money on the table – and Ahmed's honour as a chef is at stake.

Lilly is sitting at one of the other tables with her camera team. There is only ever one meal on the menu here: Beef Palestine. Nina turns up and asks if she can join Lilly and her crew. Nina is very friendly, and they soon get into conversation. But Lilly finds it hard to deal with her uncertainty – and the fascination she feels for the fragile Nina. At one point their hands touch, and their eyes meet several times. Often they both begin the same sentence simultaneously.

At one of the other tables Tore, the Swede, is typing on his laptop. By himself, surrounded by many empty coffee cups. Tmara, the cook's daughter, comes to stand beside him. She points at his pack of cigarettes. "For your Daddy?" But Tmara doesn't reply. Tmara never says anything. Tore gives her a cigarette. He pats the girl.

On the other side of the sandbags at the delivery entrance, Ahmed the cook is trying to salvage his honour. The merchant he is bargaining with shakes his head: not a chance. The money Ahmed offers him – which comes to \$780 – will secure spices and oil, raisins, honey and rice. But obtaining a lamb of this quality is complicated, extremely complicated. It would cost \$1000 – more. So Ahmed does not have enough money. Now Tmara comes along. She is clutching the object wrapped in silver foil. Ahmed unwraps it: the Italian's satellite phone. The merchant nods: it's a deal.

In the restaurant Aique comes over to join Lilly and Nina at their table. He kisses Nina with an air of easy familiarity, taking charge of the conversation. The budding friendship between Lilly and Nina is placed on hold.

Lilly picks up her mobile and calls her husband, addressing him loudly in Italian. It is as though she is trying to make Nina feel jealous by making the call. Now Aique leaves. Nina gives him her room key but remains seated at the table. She asks Lilly if she is married. Is she happy with her husband? "I don't know," says Lilly. "I have never really thought about it. Yes." – "Who were you talking to on your mobile, just

now? Your husband?" – "Yes, Mario, we live in Rome."

"There is no signal down here," says Nina. "You were just pretending." She reaches for Lilly's hand, clutching it for too long. Lilly doesn't pull her hand away, although the sensation is unpleasant as well as pleasant. "Is that uncomfortable for you?" asks Nina. Lilly doesn't reply. Instead she looks at her watch and says she must go. Now Nina kisses Lilly. On the lips. Outside the restaurant, behind a cold marble wall, Lilly is breathing heavily. Nina has completely turned her life upside down. Otherwise so self-possessed and independent, Lilly is now trembling like a schoolgirl who has just been kissed for the first time.

A new delivery of mosaic stones arrives at the room where the Italian photographers are staying; now half of George Bush Senior's face has been set out in stone. Mohammed, a hotel employee, is given a thick wad of euros in payment. In the next room he purchases some Japanese hard-core DVDs.

In the kitchen Ahmed is cutting up vegetables when the supplier arrives with a freshly slaughtered lamb, skinned and ready to be filleted. The flesh is as red as fresh blood. Ahmed smells it, inhaling the odour with eyes closed and a reverent expression.

In Tore's room the six-packs of bottled water form a pile that reaches up to the ceiling. The window is covered with a cobweb of duct tape. Tore is sitting on the edge of the bed with Tmara. He places her hand on the inside of his thigh. Tmara slaps him across the face, takes his cigarettes and walks out of the room. Through the open door we seek him sitting there, weeping.

Lilly is back in her room. Here too the pile of bottled water reaches up to the ceiling. A sofa has been turned on its side and pushed against the taped-up window to provide extra protection. There are also sandbags between the window and the sofa. The mattress is on the floor, protected by this arrangement. Lilly's laptop is on the table, while on the other tables there is a small editing studio, metal cases with equipment, and a generator. Lilly is standing in the bathroom, staring at her reflection. There are petrol canisters piled up in here, forming a curious contrast with Lilly's toiletries and perfumes, creams and cosmetics. When Lilly turns the tap there is a gurgling sound but no water. Lilly splashes herself with water from the half-full bathtub, to clear her mind. Then she hurls herself back into her work, phoning her TV station, noting down appointments and subjects, chain-

smoking.

She has run out of cigarettes. Lilly comes out of her room, walks along the corridor and hears voices from one of the rooms. Lilly listens at the door. It is 303. Someone hits someone else. A man's voice can be heard. Lilly knocks at the door. Aique appears. "Everything all right?" – "Everything is fine, we're working," replies Aique. Down at the reception desk, after buying her cigarettes, Lilly asks who is in room 303. A German woman. Nina something. The porter knows all about her. Lilly goes back upstairs and listens again at the door of the room 303. Silence. The door is not properly closed. Someone is weeping quietly, as if she has just been sobbing loudly. Lilly knocks and walks in; Nina is lying on the bed behind the sandbags, naked. "Close the door and lock it," says Nina. Lilly sits down next to Nina and tries to comfort her. "Hold me. Hold me tight." Lilly is breathing heavily as she strokes Nina's forehead. "Hold me". Lilly holds Nina's arms, stroking her. At some point, as if by chance, Lilly's hand touches Nina's breast. Nina places Lilly's hands on her breasts. Lilly does not resist. Her heart is pounding.

The building is shaken by an explosion.

Lilly and Nina are thrown to the floor by the shock wave. The door has been blown open. The corridor outside is full of dust. Lilly tries to find out what is happening, but nobody knows exactly. An Iraqi bomb? A cruise missile? Friendly fire – or unfriendly? CNN is playing in the Canadian reporters' room: an American tank has fired a shell at the hotel. Lilly listens, speechless. In the room where the shell struck we see splinters, dust, water from shattered plastic bottles. Photographs, flashlights, camera lights. Lilly grabs a bullet-proof vest from her room and races back to room 303. Nina is no longer there. Lilly hurries along endless corridors, combing the entire hotel for Nina.

In the gent's toilet Tore is washing his face. Water drips from the tap with a throaty croak. Tmara appears in the doorway and gives him the key to his room. Then she takes him by the hand and leads him along the corridor. Tore's face becomes more and more pale; it was his room that was hit by the shell.

Now it is night. Lilly comes back to her own room and collapses on the bed, exhausted.

In the kitchen Ahmed is working feverishly. He keeps on basting the



lamb roasting in the oven. Various saucepans are simmering on the cooker.

Two Iraqis are shovelling rubble out of Tore's room. Tore rescues his belongings from the chaos.

Nina is standing on the roof of the Hotel Palestine in her dressing gown. It is a warm night. She opens her dressing gown, and the warm wind caresses her delicate body.

In the basement garage men with water pipes are gathered around a TV set, watching Al-Jazira. There is a report about the final American offensive. It is the calm before the storm. Meanwhile, Aique and his colleagues are sitting in the restaurant, waiting for their dish of Syrian lamb.

In the small cellar next to the basement garage Tmara is standing, her eyes open wide in horror. In Lilly's room the phone rings. It is Nina, standing at the end of the corridor on the top floor of the hotel, speaking on a public phone.

In the restaurant the roast lamb is served. Ahmed watches proudly through the peephole in the kitchen door as Aique and the other reporters devour the meal. Aique closes his eyes in ecstasy; it is delicious.

Tmara has appeared in the kitchen clutching the blue rope which is all that is left of her goat. She stares at her father, her expression rigid. Ahmed's face freezes. Once again he looks through the peephole at the men sitting around the table, now quite drunk, enjoying the best meal of the whole war. Lamb in honey. Lamb? Tmara's goat.

Lilly has struggled up the stairs. The upper floors of the hotel are deserted. Nina is standing at the top of the last flight of stairs. "Let us go and look at the stars, Lilly; tomorrow everything will be different.". Nina breaks open a door, and we are on the hotel roof: satellite dishes, cables fed through ventilation shafts, fans, water tanks, antenna. Nina cautiously takes Lilly by the hand. There is street-fighting at the edge of the city, like distant lightning. "Hold me," Nina says, opening her dressing gown. Lilly embraces Nina. Nina lets Lilly's hair down and then gestures towards a mattress: "I brought it up here. Let's lie down and look at the stars." At first they both lie there, motionless. Nina is naked, covered only with her dressing gown. She opens it. "Now take

your clothes off." Nina opens Lilly's pants, unbuttons her blouse, lifts up her sports bra. Now Lilly and Nina are both lying there naked. "Isn't it beautiful?" The lightning on the horizon becomes stronger. Nina runs her hand over Lilly's body, over her stomach, hips, encircling her pubic mound. Silence. Nina holds Lilly tight: "Let's stay up here." The chattering of the anti-aircraft guns. Trails of light across the sky like fluorescent whips. The bombers have come. The noise increases, bombs explode, sirens wail, the monotonous rumble of the aircraft engines merges with the chatter of the Iraqi anti-aircraft fire. Flashes of light. Lilly and Nina's movements become more and more intense as they make love passionately. Now it is raining fire and bombs over the Hotel Palestine. Lilly and Nina merge together. One last attack, very close. The shock wave blasts overhead like a brief storm. Lilly's head falls back, off the mattress, as if exhausted. Her expression is one of ecstasy. Nina runs her hand over Lilly's sweat soaked back – and then sees the blood on her hand. Lilly is not moving now.

Tears pour down Nina's desperate face. Lilly is motionless. Nina shakes her, but Lilly still does not move. Finally Nina places the dead Lilly on the mattress, closing her eyes and painting her lips red with blood from her hand. Nina kisses the dead Lilly one last time on the forehead and looks round for the dressing gown. The explosions have now ceased, dawn is breaking, and the only sound to be heard in Baghdad is the two-tone horns of the ambulances.

Nina is sitting in her room, clutching her knees, her expression apathetic and her face pale. She reaches out in search of her mobile phone. Her eyes are swollen as she gazes ahead blankly.

On the roof, Lilly is lying on the mattress, naked. She is very beautiful, with her lips painted blood red. A mobile rings. Once, twice, three times. It rings again. And again. Suddenly Lilly opens her eyes. She sits up and realises that she is naked. Her mobile is still ringing. Lilly touches the back of her head and finds blood on her fingertips. "What am I doing here?" Her mobile is still ringing. She takes the call: "Hello?" There is a crackle from the other end. Lilly speaks in Italian: "Mario? I don't know anyone called Mario; you must have made a mistake." She hangs up.

Ahmed is lying on his mattress, asleep. In the corridor Tore is sleeping on a leather sofa. Aique is in his bed. On his editing monitor we hear the squeaking of the fornicating couples in the Japanese hard-core DVD.

There is a crater the size of a bathroom in front of the Hotel Palestine. At the place where Tmara was standing at the beginning of the film, smoking a cigarette. And at the edge of the crater there is a child's sandal.

A child's foot is pushed into the sandal. It is Tmara. She bends down and retrieves a cigarette end from the ground. We hear the click of a Zippo. Then there is the rattle of tank tracks and the deeper, animalistic engine noise of a ten-cylinder tank engine. A GI, his gun at the ready, gets down from the tank and approaches Tmara. "Is this downtown Baghdad? The Palestine?" Tmara ignores him and carries on smoking her cigarette.

## **TITLES**