



HER OWN FREEDOM

A philosophical Things to Come traces a woman's path

Things to Come is an odd title (translated from the French *L'avenir*). Is it a threat or a promise? It's a little of both, and all happening to Nathalie (Isabelle Huppert).

A students' strike at Nathalie's school makes getting to work a challenge; her publisher questions the relevance of her textbooks; her aging mother grows more demanding; her husband, Heinz (Andre Marcon), hardly speaks. Her children are grown and out of the house, but writer-director Mia Hansen-Løve never gives the sense that Nathalie would've been defined by them even were they younger. Her intellectual life sustains her, she tells a former student, the charismatic Fabien (Roman Kolinka).

Can that be enough? *Things to Come* takes place at one of those impossible, entirely believable points in a person's life when everything changes at once, and the understated joy of the film is watching Huppert as Nathalie adjusts her world. Sometimes the change is visible outside of her: The half-empty bookshelves when Heinz leaves are an affront to her intellect and an eyesore in their perfectly appointed apartment. Mostly, though, change is in Huppert's face, her walk, her conversations.

Hansen-Løve, the daughter of two philosophy teachers, knows the philosophy that Nathalie argues, and it would take a second viewing of the film to pick up and examine all the references. Each book Nathalie picks up tells part of her story, whether she reads it or dismisses it. But her story isn't just in the arguments and conversations. It's also in how they're made. The Nathalie who presses her point in class is a far cry from the Nathalie who shrugs off an argument with Fabien's more radical friends, who've moved to a farm in the stunning countryside. She's too old to be a radical, she tells a younger woman, who disagrees.

Nathalie's not too old for anything — not to learn to care about a cat, or swim in a river or have a certain tension with her former student. Subtly, gracefully, Huppert shifts herself through Hansen-Løve's story. As in *Elle*, she's playing a character who rarely reacts to things as expected, and how she *does* react is an exploration of ongoing, unexpected change — the kind that reshapes how a person thinks about herself and her relation to your world.

The things that happen to Nathalie are not her choices, and they're things — death, separation — that we've seen play out in narratives a million times before. It's rare, though, to see such a careful examination of a woman regarding the world she built for herself — out of all the expected blocks, family and career and love — and finding a new way to live within it. *Things to Come* can be slow, and pensive, and so much rests on Huppert's slight shoulders and slight frown that if you don't like *her*, you may not like the film in the least. But Hansen-Løve's investigation of a woman growing into her own sort of freedom is a quiet, bittersweet delight.

Things to Come opens Friday, Feb. 10, at Broadway Metro.

BROADWAY METRO FEBRUARY 10-16

THINGS TO COME (L'AVENIR)
FRI-TUE 3:45 6:00
WED 3:45
THU 3:45 6:00

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FRI 11:30 6:20 10:30
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FRI 1:20 8:10
SAT 8:10
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LA LA LAND
11:25 2:10 5:00 7:45 10:15

MANCHESTER BY THE SEA
11:15 2:05 3:30 7:25 10:05

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