A FELICITY PRODUCTION production

THE DAYS AFTER

A film by Stéphanie Pillonca

2026 – France – 2.35:1 – 5.1

Running time: 90 min

Press materials available for download at www.jour2fete.com

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SYNOPSIS

In a charming country village, Louise, in her fifties, returns alone to her childhood home to clear it out. As she reconnects with childhood friends, takes in the beauty of nature, welcomes visits from her children and her husband, and rediscovers her bond with Marc, her first love, she feels drawn toward a new momentum: reinventing herself, questioning her desires, and making peace with who she is. It is a defining moment in life, one in which any woman can choose to move forward, allow herself to bounce back, and open a new chapter toward the future.

INTERVIEW WITH STÉPHANIE PILLONCA

How did this film come about?

It is a loose adaptation of the graphic novel *Les Couloirs aériens* by Christophe Hermenier, Étienne Davodeau and Joub. The producer Christine Rouxel brought it to me. Then I met Jalil Lespert, who had initiated the project. The hero was a man returning to his childhood home. My co-writer Catherine Hoffmann and I fully embraced the idea of telling the story from a woman's point of view. We found it somewhat reductive that it is always men of that age who dive into introspection, go back to their roots and build themselves a parallel life. We wanted to tell something truer, because this kind of soul-searching very often happens to women of Louise's age as well.

What did you most want to show through this film?

I wanted to show how unfathomable women's hearts are, and mothers' hearts in particular. They are a crucible of paradoxes, sacrifices, questions and worries, but also of immense hope. We hardly ever talk about the secret inner life of a woman of 50, and yet it is fascinating. We don't really know who these women are, these mothers of grown-up children: who they think about at night, whether they have lived what they had to live, whether they have regrets. That is what interests me, and what I would like people to look at.

Having often addressed disability and illness, you now explore grief. Does it call for the same kind of resilience?

Yes, because whenever I address disability, I inevitably address death. Fragility is closely tied to a form of decline or impediment. Whether it is disability, breast cancer or child sexual abuse, I always stand on the side of vulnerability. And a woman of 50 is deeply vulnerable. She is made invisible, seen as unattractive by our society, and very rarely represented. We barely talk about the symptoms that come with this stage of life; for a long time they were reduced to simple "depression." We rarely talk about hormones, or about what happens once a woman has fulfilled her role as wife, mother, keeper of the home and enabler of everyone else's achievements.

Does the death of a parent always take us back to our childhood?

It takes us back to the part of ourselves that goes with them, but also to our own decline, our own departure. It makes us question how fleeting life is and, paradoxically, it invites us to live more intensely, to ask ourselves: "What am I really living right now?" It pushes us to question the time we have left.

Is absence, here caused by the loss of the father, difficult to film?

Yes, because while absence has its own rhythm, taste and music, it is also a great deal of emptiness. On screen, what we remember are colours and movement, but

absence is a kind of movement that slows down. It is the opposite of action: when we are busy, the mind is occupied and we suffer less from the loss. Action as an antidote to despair. Filming absence therefore means filming a slowing down, an opacity, something that seeps into everything. In cinema, where we are asked to say a great deal in very little time, that is a real challenge. Absence means stretching time and space, holding your breath, sitting still, looking at the infinitely small. That is what Louise does in her childhood home.

How does the rural setting shape the story?

It allows quicker access to other people. In the countryside, people connect more easily, share more readily and are more available. In the city, beyond loneliness, there is isolation: everyone goes about their life without really being seen. Here, Louise is seen. People come looking for her. Her neighbour, her childhood friend drops by, everyone knows who is doing what with whom. There is an immediacy in human relationships that suits her journey well.

What does Louise's profession as a radiologist say about her?

Unlike her father, she is not a doctor, she is a radiologist, and she points that out in the film. Being a country GP demands far more availability than working in a radiology practice. You can't do everything at once when you are a mother, or only at the cost of sacrifices. There is also the scientific approach: Louise chose medical imaging over the human dimension, the closeness and intimacy her father shared with his patients. And Louise will discover and feel that human dimension through the objects she photographs.

What does this rediscovered passion for photography reveal?

It reveals a desire to record pieces of herself, because everything slips away from us. Time flies, and it carries matter away with it. We part with objects, they become obsolete, just like bodies. Taking photographs means recording memories, time, one's own story, leaving a trace.

With the little photo studio, which I wanted to be very theatrical, it is also about giving the past its place again: these objects are pieces of her, which we bring into the light, which we hold sacred. And photography is also an abandoned passion. Marc tells her she used to take a lot of pictures and then gave it all up. That is very common among women of 50: the number of passions locked away in the cupboard is staggering. They give up a great deal, not for lack of interest, but out of self-sacrifice, out of giving. Through photography, Louise finally begins to allow herself something of her own again.

Her bond with Marc rekindles old feelings, and yet we sense there is still love and desire between Louise and her husband…

Yes, it was important for me to show that, because Marc (Jalil Lespert) awakens the woman she used to be. She starts listening again to what might happen to her. In his

eyes, she is no longer the same: there is a sparkle, a lightness, a rediscovered carefreeness, time for herself. Many women, halfway through their lives, have experienced something very youthful, very springlike, that reminds them they are deeply alive.

That said, I didn't want this to be the story of "a woman who is unhappy in her marriage." Louise has woven her entire life around her relationship with Alexandre (Christopher Thompson), and none of that is shattered. We are often told that everything is over, but it is more nuanced than that. You can still love the man with whom you built your life. You can stop loving and still love, especially when you have loved very deeply. This period of life is often described as chaotic – menopause, brain fog, the urge to drop everything – but I believe in nuance: the couple remains a refuge, a comfort, despite the tensions. In fact, many people today see divorce differently: you don't have to hate each other, you can find a peaceful bond again.

The male characters – husband, lover, father, son, brother, friend – are all shown as fragile, tender and kind, far from any caricatured opposition between men and women. Was that important to you?

Yes, I absolutely did not want to set up a simplistic opposition between men and women. I am wary of clear-cut dualities, of black-and-white antagonisms.

So I didn't want to make Marc a glorious hero riding in "on his white horse." He is a man broken by a separation, by a life that has fallen apart. What moves me about him is that he can still love, but he cannot encourage this woman to give up her husband: he knows all too well what that imposed solitude means when everything collapses. He is a wounded hero, reasonable, reserved, dignified, and it is that kind of poetry that interests me.

This nuance runs through all the male characters in the film: the husband, the lover, the sons, the father, the brother, the best friend. In their own way, they share a kind of "male sisterhood." They are kind, supportive and loving men, with their limits and their flaws, but also with a lot of heart. The son is considerate, the husband tries to do his best, the brother is tangled up in his own troubles but remains gentle with his sister, the best friend could almost have been a best girlfriend. They are never the "bad guys" set against a woman alone in the world. A woman can have desires, choices and questions regardless of how men treat her – and in this film, we see that they are all simply trying to do what they can with what they have.

That, for me, is the film's "male sisterhood": men who are not idealised, who are fragile and fallible, but who remain deeply sensitive and kind. They don't come to rescue a woman crushed by their harshness; they live alongside her in an emotional complexity where everyone is modestly trying to remain dignified and to keep loving.

How did Valérie Donzelli become the obvious choice for Louise?

For a woman director, Valérie means a great deal. She embodies freedom: she has never compromised in her work. Every time she has directed, she has done so with her own world, her energy, her music. There is a "Donzelli sound" in her acting as well as in her directing. She is radical and truly one of a kind. I remember seeing

THE QUEEN OF HEARTS and thinking: "So you can actually do that?" As a woman, she is also very inspiring. On set, she amazed me with her ability to play anything. She has an immediacy of emotion and an extraordinary generosity. And the camera loves her, captures her, makes her shine. It is spectacular to watch.

Did the chemistry with Jalil Lespert come naturally?

Yes, the couple came together very naturally. At first he didn't want to act, but I saw in him exactly the Marc I needed. At this point in his life, he carries great emotion, a lot of purity and poetry. He no longer has the power or the certainty of a younger man; he is more porous, more poetic. I told him that Marc had a lot of him in him, in the way he looks at the world, in his tenderness.

Their pairing worked wonderfully. They are two artists who have achieved a great deal, professionally and personally. They come with a kind of happy wisdom. On set, everything was simple and fluid. It was almost an ode to being in your fifties: you no longer force your way in, you come as you are, enriched by your failures and your moments of brilliance.

How did you build the cast around this couple?

I called back François Berléand, whom I have directed many times and whom I adore, because he brings a carefreeness, a whimsy and an incredible personality to his characters. Thierry Godard, whom I had met on a festival jury, was perfect as the best friend: reassuring, sturdy, reserved and boyish. Waxx – I follow him on social media and love his work – embodied a kind of intermittent, freelance life that was perfect for the character of the brother, a rocker who never quite made it. Besides, I have always liked bringing in people who are not necessarily from the film world. Christopher Thompson has that mix of mystery, slightly British elegance, rigour and gentleness, with something very childlike that made him the ideal father figure, the one you want to come home to. As for Gabriel Donzelli, he represents those teenagers or young adults who are quickly written off as "uncool" because they don't fit the dominant codes. I had seen him on stage; he has astonishing freedom and maturity. And bringing him together with his mother, in a film about parenthood and lineage, made a lot of sense.

What were your priorities in terms of direction and visuals?

I wanted the house to be a cocoon, a sheltering closed world, almost a drifting boat. Something dreamlike and old-fashioned, with colours from another time, a bubble in which Louise can finally find herself again. I worked a lot on materials and textures: velvets, silks, shimmering fabrics, but also her father's big Shetland wool sweater, which she wraps herself in. I wanted those old, slightly worn cashmeres, the cupboards you open to find thick linen sheets, shirts, intimate things, lavender. The mirrors, the paintings, the books, the objects: all of it is part of her memory.

For the lighting, we worked with autumnal shades: browns, reds, russets, yellows – warm, reassuring tones. They, too, are in the autumn of their lives. We are neither in the harsh light of spring nor in high summer. Autumn, with its *flares*, its leaves, its

walks through nature that is still a little green, captured that tipping point well. When she curls up in her father's sweater, everything is there. I wanted her to be beautiful, grey roots included, because I find this age beautiful and Valérie is spectacularly beautiful. Society is so inclined to hide these women that I wanted, on the contrary, to put them in the spotlight.

How did you approach the music?

I wanted something surprising. I really love the work of Audrey Ismaël and Bastien Burger, whom I admire as much as people as I do as artists. I was very happy that they agreed to collaborate on this film with subtle proposals. The clarinet, for example, has something old-fashioned about it, almost like a tune that keeps coming back, a reminiscence. It fitted perfectly with this bubble in time, this slowing down, this necessary scaling back in order to find meaning in one's life again.
Among the additional songs, *Tes états d'âmes Éric*, by Luna Parker, was an obvious choice for me. It was the song of my seventeenth year. For many girls of my generation, that track stirs something: the arrival of this singular artist, the way she sang, dressed, danced, did her make-up… She was a real signature in the music scene of the time. When you hear those sounds again, a whole world comes back. It is the song we listened to over and over and danced to with Valérie. It is a generational song, a bit indie, never number one in the charts, but a fixture of late-night radio. It also tells the story of that youth.

How did the film's title, THE DAYS AFTER (LES JOURS D'APRÈS), come about?

I like titles to have meaning. *The Days After* means after motherhood, after the young years, after reaching the peak of one's career, after loss. But

"after" is not an end, it is the beginning of something.

For me, there is also a personal link with LES JOURS D'AVANT (The Days Before), a film I wrote but was unable to make. It meant a great deal to me; it drew on testimonies from victims of the 13 November 2015 Paris attacks. Not being able to get it made was very painful. THE DAYS AFTER is a way of exorcising what could not come to be, and a nod to that aborted project.

What makes you proudest about this film?

Having made a film about a love story and about love with a capital L: the love we feel for those who came before us, for those who follow us and for those around us.

It makes me think of Marjane Satrapi, whose personality and work I loved passionately. She once told me that, in her eyes, the most punk thing you could do would be to make a film that told nothing but a love story. I like giving a nod to the great filmmaker, the great artist and the great lover she was.

INTERVIEW WITH VALÉRIE DONZELLI

What drew you to this project?

First of all, meeting Stéphanie Pillonca, a woman who is both very moving and very interesting, and who spoke about her film beautifully. This story of a 50-year-old woman, a mother of grown-up children, at a turning point in her life with a loss to overcome, was very well written and very sensitive. Also, the question of what a woman goes on creating and building after 50, in a kind of existential crisis, struck me as quite rare in cinema. And I had the feeling that this character was "within my range," that I knew her. For all these reasons, I wanted to embark on this adventure and put my trust in Stéphanie and her vision.

How did you get under Louise's skin?

When I feel able to play a role, it is often because I feel as if I have known these people and can bring them back to life. They are like people who are a part of me without being me. So I don't particularly prepare for roles; I don't have a specific technique, it's more about letting go.

But there is still a path to follow. It starts with an inner connection to the character, and then I build the outer shell. Make-up, hair and costumes are very important: it is during the fittings that the character becomes real. Sometimes a single detail is enough to bring them to life: you think, "that's them." Louise has dyed blonde hair but also greying roots, for example. In other words, she hasn't completely let herself go, but she is no longer trying to control everything either. At 53, I play characters of that age, and I enjoy portraying women who accept their physical maturity. I also remember "lending" her a little floral dressing gown of mine, because I thought it suited her perfectly. I often bring personal objects into my own films, but doing so as an actress is fairly new. Perhaps it's a way of building a bridge between myself and the character…

In any case, on this film, playing Louise felt quite natural, because Stéphanie leaves a lot of room for the actors, for their performance, for improvisation. All I really had to do was let myself be this woman.

What was Stéphanie Pillonca like on set?

What struck me was her great sensitivity and the way she works with her team. She really has a "little army" of incredible collaborators she has worked with for a long time. It is an extremely close-knit team.

We had 21 days of shooting – which was short – but they all supported Stéphanie with remarkable energy and kindness. She was the captain of the ship, while leaving a lot of room for our acting and our interpretation, with tremendous humility. It was rather magical, and I have very fond memories of it.

As a director yourself, were you tempted to contribute ideas?

Absolutely not! What interests me when I act is precisely being able to surrender completely to the director's vision. I found that all the easier on this project because I had a major role. It hasn't actually happened to me that often, carrying a film for other directors. On Stéphanie's set, I felt truly free in my performance. I experienced that moment of grace where I managed to be completely present, because I trusted her, because the role was at the heart of the story and allowed me to be there from beginning to end. I often have more freedom as an actress in my own films, because I dare more, knowing that I am the one directing and know where to set the dial. Sometimes, with others, you hold back a little. But on this shoot I felt very free, and it was a real pleasure.

What were your fellow actors like?

I loved working with Jalil Lespert. He was extremely endearing and very present. The same goes for Thierry Godard, a brilliant actor who truly embodies the best friend every woman dreams of.

I knew Christopher Thompson well, as he is part of my film family and has acted in my work, notably in NONA AND HER DAUGHTERS. Since I thought he was perfect as the solid, handsome husband who has "done well for himself," I suggested him to Stéphanie, who thought it was a good idea. The same goes for Thelma Pourias, who plays my daughter. She is a wonderful young actress who has just entered the Conservatoire national, and to whom I gave a small part in AT WORK and then a bigger one in *Les Figurants*, the play I directed in Avignon.

As for Gabriel Donzelli, it was Stéphanie's idea to cast him as the son of Louise's friends. He is great, very unexpected in this somewhat gothic role. With all these fellow actors, you could say we were a family in the broadest sense.

What did this film teach you?

When you direct, you often feel that all films are made the way you make yours, because your own is the only model you have; but acting on other sets, you see different ways of doing things. And with Stéphanie, I learned a lot from the way she speaks to actors. She is never hurtful, always spot on. I realised that on my own films I could sometimes be confusing or a little abrupt without realising it, and her way of directing actors truly inspired me.

As a woman, I don't know if the film "taught" me anything, but there was such kindness between us, a kind of sisterhood, of natural support, that this shoot will remain marked by something powerful and very rich.

How did you react when you first saw the film?

I find the film surprising, deeply human in scale. It has something very simple about it that gradually catches up with you. I was very moved at the end, as if overtaken by something quite unexpected.

INTERVIEW WITH JALIL LESPERT

How did this film come about?

Its genesis took a bit of a detour. When I read the graphic novel, I started thinking it would be interesting to consider an adaptation, with a view to directing it myself or co-producing it with Christine Rouxel. Then I lost my father and, even though I cared about the project, I felt the need to distance myself a little from this story of grief. That is when Christine Rouxel had the idea of making the main character a woman and entrusting the direction to a woman. She told me about Stéphanie Pillonca, who loved the idea of reworking the screenplay to make it her own, and indeed turning it into a female character. When I met Stéphanie, we immediately "clicked." She spoke about the project beautifully, and then I watched her films, especially her documentaries, and found her to be an excellent, very sensitive filmmaker.

Why did turning the hero into a female character make sense to you?

If I was moved by this character when I discovered the graphic novel, it was because I felt there was something quite universal about him. But later on, I thought it might be even more interesting to observe all the
quirks specific to the midlife crisis in a woman, because it was less common, and because, beyond opening up the casting, it would shed a different light on the film.

How did Stéphanie work on her own adaptation?

She started from the screenplay I had developed, keeping a lot from the graphic novel and from the first adaptation, but she tightened and condensed the story considerably. Some passages were more atmospheric, more laconic, and she made them livelier, more focused, centring the film on what is most precise and most powerful about Louise.

Were you involved in casting the film?

No, not at all. Even though I co-produced the film, I wanted to give Stéphanie complete freedom to prepare it and cast it. And once she offered me the role of Marc, I wanted to follow the project from even further away in terms of preparation, because I felt it was healthier to arrive on set purely as an actor.

How did you approach Marc, your character?

I hadn't thought of playing him at all at first – partly because in my version the character was a woman – but I accepted because it was a way of supporting Stéphanie as closely as possible on this adventure. On set, I let myself be guided by her directions and her wishes. I saw Marc as someone fundamentally good, a "good guy" who doesn't overthink things. In the film, he carries something quite painful inside him – which we discover at the end – but he has the grace not to share it at every turn. It brings him back to what is essential. I didn't try to make him anything other than someone grounded and good. It is rare to meet fundamentally good people, and I know Marc is one of them.

What was Valérie Donzelli like as a scene partner?

Wonderful! Our collaboration was very fluid, because we are from the same generation and Stéphanie approached the scenes the way we like to play them, almost improvised. It was about finding life and freedom in the scenes. As actors, that is always enjoyable, especially for a contemporary film about life and everyday reality. For me there was something to capture, a kind of immanence. And working with Valérie, who took to it immediately, was very pleasant: we were both very happy to be able to unfold freely in scenes that were almost free-wheeling.

Did having three directors on set – Stéphanie, Valérie and yourself – change anything?

When you are acting, you gladly leave your director's hat in the cloakroom. Besides, Valérie and I don't act that much for other people, so we were happy to have that space to play and have fun. And Stéphanie has enormous experience: having worked in documentary, film and television, she knows what she wants and creates an atmosphere free of oppressive hierarchy. Working with her is a real pleasure. Especially as she is surrounded by a great team: everyone knows each other, it feels very much like a family and very simple, so everything runs smoothly and quickly.

How did you enjoy sharing scenes with François Berléand?

Working with François Berléand again was a real pleasure. I played his son in a film a very long time ago, and meeting him again twenty years later was quite touching. Our scenes in this film were shot in a single day, very short, almost like a wink. But it was great, because he has worked a lot with Stéphanie, so once again there was something very familial and simple about it.

How did you react when you saw the finished film?

Valérie is so brilliant in the film; she brings so much humanity and humour. It would have been easy to tip over into something sadder, more anxious, but she brings a freshness, an inventiveness, a way of being funny, offbeat and intelligent, which Stéphanie always sought out and encouraged in her direction. It is a film about everyday life, universal, full of real emotions that we have all felt or will all feel one day – a feel-good film.

STÉPHANIE PILLONCA – BIOGRAPHY

A director and screenwriter, Stéphanie Pillonca has built a singular and deeply human body of work. Her cinema is driven by a simple desire: to give a voice to those who are rarely heard and to offer a different perspective on unconventional life paths.
In her documentary JE MARCHERAI JUSQU'À LA MER (I Will Walk to the Sea), she follows Alexandra, who became severely disabled after an accident, and tells her story without ever giving in to a pitying gaze. Above all, she films a woman, with her desires, her struggles and her will to live. She then directed her first feature film, FLEUR DE TONNERRE (Thunder Flower), in 2017. Adapted from Jean Teulé's novel, the film traces the life of the poisoner Hélène Jégado, and confirms her interest in extraordinary trajectories and powerful female characters. This commitment continued with the TV film APPRENDRE À T'AIMER (Learning to Love You), which follows a young couple facing their child's Down syndrome diagnosis at birth. Broadcast on M6 in 2020, the film was a major success, drawing 3.8 million viewers. In 2021, Stéphanie returned to documentary and won over press and audiences with C'EST TOI QUE J'ATTENDAIS (It's You I Was Waiting For), which explores adoption through testimonies filled with love and hope. The film received the Best Film award at the La Baule Film and Film Music Festival, as well as the Audience Award in the documentary category at the Festival 2 Cinéma in Valenciennes. In 2023, with INVINCIBLE ÉTÉ (Invincible Summer), she recounted Olivier Goy's fight against ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), portraying his tremendous zest for life and extraordinary optimism – a rare documentary that has allowed him to pursue his ALS awareness campaign far beyond cinema screens. Her latest documentary, INCESTE, LE COMBAT D'UNE VIE (Incest, a Lifelong Fight), recently broadcast on Arte, bears even more direct witness to her commitment. Through the testimony of Steffy Alexandrian, Stéphanie Pillonca offers a powerful awareness-raising tool and helps make the voices of incest survivors heard.

CAST

Louise Guyon	Valérie DONZELLI
Marc	Jalil LESPERT
Sébastien	Thierry GODARD
Alexandre	Christopher THOMPSON
Emma	Thelma POURIAS
Michaël	Benjamin HEKIMIAN “WAXX”
Pablo	Gabriel DONZELLI
Corinne	Stéphanie BATAILLE
The Lady with the Dog	Chantal NEUWIRTH
Lucas	Victor KERVERN
Henri	François BERLÉAND

CREW

Director	Stéphanie PILLONCA
Screenplay	Jalil LESPERT, Naël MARANDIN, Stéphanie PILLONCA, Catherine HOFFMANN, in collaboration with Christine ROUXEL
Cinematography	Hugues POULAIN
Original Music	Audrey ISMAËL & Bastien BURGER
Production Design	Margaux COSTE
Editing	Fabien BOUILLAUD
First Assistant Director	Gérard BONNET
Sound	Romain BOSSOUTROT, Dominique GABORIEAU, Vincent MONTROBERT, Rodolphe RISSE
Script Supervisor	Marilyne BRULÉ
Costume Design	Anne-Sophie DOZOUL
Makeup	Sandrine INIZAN
Hair	Marc CLÉMENT
Casting	Adélaïde MAUVERNAY
Line Producer	Amaury SERIEYE
Unit Manager	Sarah LERES
Produced by	Christine ROUXEL (FELICITY PRODUCTION)
Associate Producer	Raphaël DANIEL
Co-producers	Jalil LESPERT (ONZECINQ), Olivier VERNIN (MANYOBI PRODUCTION), Gilles ROUVERAND (GOKHYO), Yves Darondeau (BONNE PIOCHE), Pierre-Emmanuel Fleurantin (PAPRIKA FILM)

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