

TIME

Good Luck To You, Leo Grande Is the Perfect Movie For Anyone Who Feels Invisible



Daryl McCormack and Emma Thompson in Good Luck To You, Leo Grande Courtesy of Searchlight Pictures

BY **STEPHANIE ZACHAREK**

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Older women's bodies, not to mention their sexuality, are something no one wants to think or talk about, least of all older women themselves. What everyone tells you when you're young eventually becomes true: at a certain age—maybe 50, maybe 60—you become invisible to most other people on the street, especially men. But at that point, you may find, it's other women

your age and older who look at you more. We look to see what others are doing with their hair, how they're dealing with the post-middle-age tummy situation, what colors they choose now that some of the old favorites no longer suit. In my experience, it's less like competition and more like camaraderie. We're all being not looked at, together.



Good Luck To You, Leo Grande—from Australian director Sophie Hyde, with a script by Katy Brand—is the first great movie, in a long time, for the invisibles. Emma Thompson plays Nancy Stokes, a 55-year-old widow whose sex life did the trick for her in the conceiving-children department—she has two, now grown—but which has otherwise been distinctly routine and unsatisfactory. And so she has hired a sex worker, a handsome charmer named Leo (Daryl McCormack, from *Peaky Blinders*), to see if he might help her find whatever has been missing, if it's findable at all.

When Leo comes to the hotel room she's rented, they spend a great deal of time talking—or, rather, Leo, one of those people who has a gift for putting others at ease, tries to tease her out of her fluttery nervousness, which carries more than a whiff of judgment about Leo himself. She asks him if his mother knows what he does for a living, a subject he clearly doesn't want to talk about. She wants to know if he's a damaged runaway with a hard-luck story. In this misguided

way, she seems to be assuaging her own guilt and shame. It takes nearly forever, but Leo finally makes her see that social-working her way toward an orgasm is not going to work.

The first visit, or at least as much as we see of it, ends with a kiss. But there are second and third visits, during which Nancy slowly lets down her guard while Leo does all the work of loosening her grip on her own self-degrading ideas about her looks, her aging body, her life. They spend time in bed—there's sex in *Leo Grande*, I think, or maybe it's really just more the *suggestion* of sex. In any event, the movie is sexy, not least because it revels in the idea that great sex comes from a connection that goes beyond what's merely physical—and this can be true, of course, even when the sex is paid for. Leo loves what he does, and he's good at it, because he likes talking to women and finding out what they want and need. Nancy is the one who tries to hang onto her shame and projects it onto him, almost to the point where he gives up on her. His patience in bed is infinite, but when Nancy crosses a line into his private life, we too suddenly see him as a human being with certain fragilities, in addition to being a gorgeous companion for hire, a person adept at playing different roles to please different people.



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Hyde and Brand tackle all of these delicate ideas with agility and humor, and the repartee—including the arguments—between Nancy and Leo feel lived in, like rumpled sheets. McCormack is wonderful, playing a guy who's confident in his own beauty without being a jerk about it. There's a fantastic moment when,

on his way to meet Nancy for the first time, he stops to check his reflection in a shop window, straightening his coat with a look that tells us he knows how fine he is.

But the trick is that as much as he likes the way *he* looks, he's still more interested in looking at others. And when his gaze falls on Nancy, she can hardly find joy in it. When we first see her, she's entering that hotel room in a dowdy skirt, with prim shoes that don't help (she's a former religious-ed teacher, and she dresses like it.) She changes into a pair of suede kitten heels—much better. And after Leo arrives, she gets up the courage to slip into the bathroom to change into a slinky peignoir ensemble—having forgotten, of course, to remove the price tag under her armpit, as Leo later discovers, teasing her about it.

Thompson has always been a terrific actor, but she reaches a new plane here, a place where her vulnerability as a person and her confidence as a performer mesh into something glorious. She's unafraid to explore Nancy's prickliness—some of the things she says to Leo are simply awful, betraying a deep judgmental streak. The film is beautifully shot—never has hotel-room light looked so meltingly sensual and luxurious. And that serves Thompson well, too. She's gorgeous to look at, not because she has no wrinkles (she does), but because her skin is so luminous. Every wrinkle-obsessed 20- or 30-year-old needs to see *Good Luck To You, Leo Grande* to unlock an essential secret before it's too late: you can have a dull, expressionless face with zero wrinkles, but great skin *plus* wrinkles is actually a fabulous look.

The movie's most exhilarating moment comes at the very end, a moment in which Nancy surveys herself in the mirror, almost fully nude. We see everything she does—the sagging skin around the stomach, the breasts that have given up trying to defy gravity. Thompson, who is 63, has talked about this scene in interviews, stressing how difficult it was for her, a woman who has always been unhappy about her body, to bare all in this way. But she must know—or let's hope she knows—that the look on her face, on Nancy's face, as she surveys and at last makes peace with this weathered landscape of a body, is like the click of a light switch. To spend even a moment being miserable in our skin,

as we all are at times, is to disrespect how far it has taken us. We know that in our hearts, but Thompson puts the truth right out there, for everyone to see.

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