



Like someone in love

Director: Abbas Kiarostami
Country: France/Japan
Date: 2012

A review by Robbie Collin for *The Daily Telegraph*:

Abbas Kiarostami is a magician of cinema: the Iranian director's films riffle through your mind like card tricks, and just when you find yourself thoroughly bamboozled, you discover with a yelp of glee that the ace of hearts has been in your pocket all along.

His new picture, *Like Someone in Love*, is another miracle at close quarters. Its subject is the impossibility of intimacy in the modern world: chewy stuff, to be sure, but Kiarostami explores it with a depth and delicacy that recalls the Japanese master Yasujiro Ozu.

Like Ozu's most famous film, this is also a Tokyo story, and while its narrative through-line is simple enough on the surface, Kiarostami continually leads you to question the words that you hear and the identities of the people who speak them. This from the very first scene, too: it takes you the entirety of the film's opening shot to work out who on earth is talking and to whom.

Eventually we realise that the speaker is Akiko (Rin Takanashi), a student who moonlights as an escort, and she reluctantly climbs into a taxi which will spirit her across town to a waiting client. Add this sequence to the long list of great Kiarostami car journeys: as she listens impassively to voicemail messages from her grandmother, reflections of skyscrapers slip over her face like spring water polishing a pebble.

Acting like someone in love is Akiko's job, and her customer, a semi-retired translator called Takashi (Tadashi Okuno), is happy to play along. When she arrives at his apartment, they chat amiably about a painting that shows a young woman training a parrot to talk — another riddle of voices and identities — and the old man offers her a bowl of homemade broth.

What happens next is unclear — sleep? sex? soup? — but the following morning, Takashi drives Akiko to university, where she bumps into her boyfriend Noriaki (Ryo Kase). For the sake of saving face, their relationship takes on yet another layer of simulation: Noriaki assumes his partner and her client are grandfather and granddaughter, and Takashi obligingly slips into the role. On they drive together, this surrogate family unit, until reality at last comes hurtling through the window.

Temporary states of make-believe are a Kiarostami mainstay: *Close-Up* tells the (true) story of an Iranian man who masqueraded as his favourite filmmaker, while in *Certified Copy*, a couple's relationship seems to change in status as scene drifts into scene. *Like Someone in Love* develops that theme even further, and in Kiarostami's hands, a cool-blooded sex-for-money transaction becomes as airy and elusive as a dream. Like the best dreams always do, it ends with a jolt, but its ideas and images linger like dust in sunlight.



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