

After the Storm [PG] 2016|Japan|118 min

UK release date	2nd June 2017
Director	Hirokazu Kore-eda
Screenplay	Hirokazu Kore-eda
Cinematographer	Yutaka Yamazaki
Cast	Hiroshi Abe (Ryôta); Yôko Maki (Kyôko); Satomi Kobayashi (Nakashumà); Kirin Kiki (Yoshiko); Taiyo Yoshizawa (Shingo)

No-one goes into a Hirokazu Kore-eda film expecting dynamite and runaway trucks. But even long-standing fans of the Japanese filmmaker might be taken aback by the supreme subtlety of his latest, achingly beautiful ode to the quiet complexities of family life.

It reminded me a little of his career-crowning 2008 masterpiece *Still Walking*, in the way it explores the multi-generational tensions in one troubled family unit with clear-eyed compassion and non-judgemental grace. And there are also strong echoes of the great *shomin-geki*, or working-class dramas, of the Japanese master Mikio Naruse.

After the Storm's central character, Ryota, is played by Hiroshi Abe, who played a character in *Still Walking* with the same name and a similar familial rank: he's both a son and a father, and both roles are proving a struggle. This Ryota is a once-promising novelist who now works for a private detective agency in the Tokyo commuter town of Kiyose, where Kore-eda himself spent much of his childhood and early adult life.

It's an unedifying job – mostly snooping on cheating husbands at neon-lit love hotels – and he claims is merely research for his long-delayed second book. In reality, though, no book is being written, and most of his cash-in-hand pay fuels his gambling addiction – a problem we're given to understand played a central role in the break-up of his marriage to Kyoko (Yoko Maki), and continues to stymie his child-support payments to his young son Shingo (Taiyo Yoshizawa).

Ryota's own father has also recently died, and he gets back in touch with his elderly mother, an adorably wily old bird called Yoshiko (Kilin Kiki), from whom he's drifted apart in the wake of his own divorce. Yoshiko's bittersweet

remembrances of her late husband's spendthrift ways suggest the apple hasn't fallen too far from the tree. And in fact when Ryota arrives at his mother's house, the first thing he does is pocket her unscratched lottery tickets and take a disrespectful bite from a rice cake placed on his father's memorial.

The film follows Ryota's gradual reconciliation with his mother and son, while the storm of the title – the 23rd typhoon to hit Tokyo this year, Ryota's sister (Satomi Kobayashi) observes at the start of the film – makes its way towards the city. Its arrival forces Ryota to shelter overnight at his mother's with his ex-wife and son, though Kore-eda doesn't use the contrivance to stir up a melodramatic showdown. Instead, it facilitates a series of beautifully played, low-key one-on-one conversations. That's the best thing about storms. They clear the air.

The film is twinklingly funny but also infused with a scruffy melancholy – often both at once, when events throw the gap between Ryota's former ambitions and his present situation into relief. ("I'm the great talent that blooms late," he tells his mother. "Well you're taking too long," she replies. "Hurry up, or I'll haunt you.")

No filmmaker today is watching ordinary human life more closely than Kore-eda, or is more unfailingly generous with what they find.

After: **Robbie Collin, The Telegraph, 18 May 2016**

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