

Document Citation

Title	Drifting clouds
Author(s)	Godfrey Cheshire
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	1996 May 27
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Kauas pilvet karkaavat (Drifting clouds), Kaurismäki, Aki, 1996

DRIFTING CLOUDS

(KAUAS PILVET KARKAAVAT)

(FINNISH)

A Sputnik (Helsinki) production. (International sales: Christa Saredi, Zurich.)

Produced, directed, written, edited by Aki Kaurismaki. Camera (color), Timo Salminen; production design, Markku Patila, Jukka Salmi; sound, Jouko Lumme; assistant director, Erja Dammert; assistant producer, Klaus Heydemann. Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (competing), May 16, 1996. Running time: 96 MIN.

Ilona Kati Outinen
Lauri Kari Vaananen
Mrs. Sjöholm Elina Salo
Melartin Sakari Kuosmanen
Lajunen Markku Peltola
Forsstrom Matti Onnismaa
(Finnish dialogue)

Aki Kaurismaki gives the era of downsizing and economic dislocation his own drolly minimalist spin in "Drifting Clouds," a tale of marriage and individual pride tested by sudden unemployment. The pic is very much in line with previous work by the Finnish helmer, especially "Match Factory Girl" and "Ariel," and should do well with his admirers on the fest and arthouse circuits. It does not, however, bid to extend his following significantly.

The pic opens observing Ilona (Kati Outinen) displaying typical assurance in her job as a stylish restaurant's hostess. In a bit of characteristic Kaurismaki comedy, the establishment's alcoholic cook suddenly goes berserk in the kitchen, wounding the doorman with a knife, but Ilona calms him and restores order in a few seconds of decisive action.

After work she takes the tram driven by her husband, Lauri (Kari Vaananen). Back at their flat, he

shows her the new TV he's bought on credit. Despite having lost their one child, the couple seems stable and content, an impression that crumbles as they both lose their jobs in short order. Ilona's vanishes when the restaurant is sold. Lauri's tram company downsizes, and he loses the lottery that determines who is let go.

The tale then sketches the difficulties and humiliation that follow losing a job. Unable to find another hostess gig, Ilona eventually ends up cooking and tending bar at a dive so sleazy that, as she woefully notes, it doesn't even have a name. Lauri turns drunken and hopeless, and has to take the bitter pill of selling the couple's car and TV.

Things take a different turn, however, when Ilona hits on the idea of opening a restaurant. The scheme hits some initial obstacles, but gets off the ground when her former employer agrees to provide the financial backing. Joined by Lauri, Ilona recruits co-workers from her previous job and sets about launching the new eatery, called the Worker's Rest. Come opening day, the public gives its approval, providing an ending that's mutely upbeat.

The telling here is vintage Kaurismaki, with spare dialogue, careful visual compositions, quirky pop music in the background and formally posed, deadpan characters played by nearly expressionless actors. The pic is dedicated to Matti Pellopnaa, the late star of "La Vie de bohème" and other Kaurismaki titles, and the nod is backed up by the nicely controlled perfs of Outinen and Vaananen, who lead a cast composed almost entirely of Kaurismaki veterans. Tech credits are fine across the board.

—Godfrey Cheshire