



## A Quiet Place

*Seicho Matsumoto , Louise Heal Kawai (Translation)*

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While on a business trip to Kobe, Tsuneo Asai receives the news that his wife Eiko has died of a heart attack. Eiko had a heart condition so the news of her death wasn't totally unexpected. But the circumstances of her demise left Tsuneo, a softly-spoken government bureaucrat, perplexed. How did it come about that his wife—who was shy and withdrawn, and only left their house twice a week to go to haiku meetings—ended up dead in a small shop in a shady Tokyo neighborhood?

When Tsuneo goes to apologize to the boutique owner for the trouble caused by his wife's death he discovers the villa Tachibana near by, a house known to be a meeting place for secret lovers. As he digs deeper into his wife's recent past, he must eventually conclude that she led a double life...

## A Quiet Place Details

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# From Reader Review A Quiet Place for online ebook

## Sarah says

i'm obsessed with japanese crime — after my higashino stint, i've been looking for the next book to read, something along a similar vein. the focus on this book was less about the mystery and more about asai and the japanese bureaucracy. it's interesting, sure, but it's not what i wanted to read. the synopsis makes it seem more mysterious than it actually is. it was very matter-of-fact and even dragged on in some places.

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## Jeanette says

This is rather a classic in Japanese crime/mystery genre. Matsumoto was an originator of the form in that country. This is before tech, I-phones, Internet- all of that. This author passed away long ago and I will read all of his. Don't know why I've overlooked him.

It's told in the "eyes" of Tsuneo Asai. He is a company man working his way up the ladder. Rung by rung. Coming from humble background and being dedicated to his education and his passing the entrance to civil service has encompassed his entire life as the primary purpose. Always the primary core to his actions. He is around 40 and has had some bad luck. No children.

He is the investigator in this story, as he is trying to determine the true circumstances of his wife of 7 years death of a heart attack. It happens in an area that she would have no reason to visit.

The beginning is super, super slow. Completely Japanese in detail, manners, logic, emotional courtesies of depth. And also many business and economic/ monetary asides to the context of information that Asai determines.

The middle of the book is better. Extremely intense and deductible sublime (aka Sherlock) conclusions for some amusing parsing to a haiku. Haiku composed by his departed wife; haiku composition was her hobby.

This is entertaining and not difficult to read. If you read Japanese works in English translation, you do understand there is always considerable positional and manners dialogue. This book included. It has deeper and deeper insight into Asai as the book proceeds.

I thought the plot, as formulaic in some aspects as it was- did take some twists. And parts of it I foresaw as inevitable. Much of the end I did.

There's a larger difference in these from Western "Christie" type fare, IMHO. It's actually maybe a couple of issues that I've noticed. It's that the "crisis" or reveal may come much sooner than in Western who-dun-its. And that more "happens" after the reveal as to the workings of their society in consequences or rectifying the "balance" of reprisal or acceptance too.

This one does both of those things. And it is truly representative of the Japanese good will and intent, yet "Company Man".

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## **Tenma says**

This novel is a mixed bag. It starts strong but slowly descends into complete idiocy. Seicho Matsumoto tried to infuse too many of his ideas into this work. The net result is a seamless fusion of two short novellas into a single story.

The first part of the novel is gripping. It was simply amazing. A man on a business trip is informed that his wife has died from a heart attack. He then learns that she suddenly collapsed while walking in a quiet posh hilly neighborhood (hence the title, a quiet place). However, knowing that his wife is an introvert that seldom travels, he begins to wonder what she was doing in that place. So he starts to investigate! Unlike other Matsumoto's works that deal with police procedural and actual detectives, here we have an average man seeking the truth about his wife.

As the man stumbles into major clues, the later part of the novel veers from an investigative tone into a thriller. This part heavily borrows from his short story "The Face". It completely ruined a rather amazing novel. Nonetheless, despite its shortcomings, the book offers the reader a look into the workings of an average salaryman in Japan. The main protagonist is a mid-level civil servant who works for the Department of Agriculture and Forestry. As such, you will see how he deals with his superiors and clients. There is so much bowing that reminded me of "Learning to Bow" by Bruce Feiler. Overall, a decent work by Matsumoto and a fantastic look into Japan during the 70s.

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## **Kim says**

At first I blamed the English translation for the unremarkable prose and plodding pace of the story. It couldn't be the author (who is praised for his psychological thrillers) could it? But the more I read, the more I understood that the dull writing was a deliberate device. The main character, Tsuneo Asai, is a middle-aged bureaucrat who has made it up the ladder in the ministry through circumspect behavior and persistent hard work. He thinks almost exclusively about his job and, as a result, his life is as unexciting as the prose Matsumoto uses to describe it. Asai's wife is younger than he is; described as plain, quiet and unassuming. She copes well with her husband's travel and work schedule, spending time with her sister and attending haiku meetings. While out of town on business, Asai is notified that his wife has died - not at their home in Tokyo, but among strangers in an unfamiliar neighborhood he wasn't aware she ever visited. Asai is understandably curious and begins an investigation that quickly turns into an obsessive need to learn exactly what kind of life his wife had been leading. At this point, the tone of the story changes and accelerates to keep pace with Asai's increasing loss of self-control.

Parts were very interesting, especially the insight into Japanese thought and societal norms. But the other parts bogged down the story with too much repetition of Asai's internal thoughts and observations. Overall, 2.5 stars rounded up.

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## **Stephen Douglas Rowland says**

After reading Matsumoto's "Pro Bono," I vowed never to read anything by him again. I hated it that much. But then I came across one of his short stories (I don't recall the title) in some anthology and read it on a whim, surprised to find that I really enjoyed it. And since people seem to love "Pro Bono" but dislike this

one, I figured I should give it a shot. Logic. At any rate, I found "A Quiet Place" to be a superb thriller (despite its overly British translation). Matsumoto still over-analyzes and repeats himself here, but it only makes the story more compelling, and it heightens the considerable suspense. Recommended.

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### **Bex says**

Seicho Matsumoto, who died in 1992, is widely acclaimed as one of Japan's best crime novelists. His work came to my attention when a new English translation by Louise Heal Kawai of his 1976 novel *Kikanakatta Basho* (*A Quiet Place*) was published earlier this year. The novel centres on Tsuneo Asai, a modest and precise government bureaucrat who learns that his wife has died suddenly while he is on a business trip. Although his wife Eiko had a heart condition and, as such, for her to die of a heart attack wasn't entirely unexpected, the circumstances surrounding her death do not seem to quite ring true to Tsuneo and he begins to investigate. Matsumoto's novel is meticulous in its execution and a wonderfully controlled piece of writing — even as events begin to spiral out of control, he maintains the suspense without deviating into the realms of hyperbole or hysteria.

*A Quiet Place* is as much of a character study of an ordinary man in extraordinary circumstances as it is a crime thriller and it is the perfect antidote to all of the many books whose jackets proclaim them to be 'the new *Gone Girl*' or 'the new *Girl on the Train*'. Although it was written and set in the 1970s, it hasn't become dated and you can really see how the writer (and translator) have taken great care in choosing each word so that it is just right.

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### **James says**

A very strange book, and while I labeled it a mystery, it's certainly not a conventional one. Here we get a peek inside of Japanese bureaucracy where graduates from Todai (Tokyo Imperial University) and other elite colleges rule over the people who do the real work. Our hardworking protagonist Asai endures this nonsense, he knows that there is no other way for him. The unexpected death of his wife Eiko under strange circumstances seems to have been the final straw, the investigation that he undertakes leads him down a dark path. It starts slow but picks up the pace near the end. A decent, unusual read.

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### **AC says**

A good yarn, by an expert crime-writer, not quite up to the level of the other two I've read, though. 3.5 stars

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### **Robin Edman says**

This book should be boring. It's a sordid little affair ending in a sordid little affair. But it's not. Tightly written, this story is somewhat stressful until it is pleasingly resolved.

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## Patrick Sherriff says

If the novel starts out somewhat slowly, with the protagonist rather laboriously going through the clues to piece together how his wife died, it does at least two things excellently: it dispenses with the need for a know-it-all sleuth, or in fact any police, and then about a third of the way from the end, yanks a twist so hard and complete that I was left having to reappraise what went before, elevating the book from a well-done pulp to a piece of art asking difficult questions of Japanese society, human morality and fate. And I hear that this wasn't even Matsumoto's best work. I'll definitely look for more of his books in translation.

Download my starter library for free here - <http://eepurl.com/bFkt0X> - and receive my monthly newsletter with book recommendations galore for the Japanophile/crime fiction/English teacher in all of us.

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## Marita says

A Quiet Place is a tale of betrayal, infidelity, obsession and guilt.

Tsuneo Asai is an assistant division chief at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry based in Tokyo. Whilst on a business trip (he is much sought after for his excellent lecture tours) he is notified that his young wife has died of a heart attack.

Once his wife had been cremated and all the necessary ceremonies had been held, Asai's thoughts turned to the circumstances of his wife's death. His wife had suffered from a weak heart: "*But here was the mystery: why had Eiko been walking up that hill?*" a) She could have taken a taxi, and b) what was she doing in that neighbourhood anyway? Asai's work is of utmost importance to him, but he can't help his mind drifting to these questions. In his spare time he starts his own investigation, simply for peace of mind. But what do a sudden cold front, an earthquake, a buxom proprietor of an upmarket cosmetics shop, and a tall man with an Alsatian dog have to do with Eiko's demise?

Asai contemplates different reasons for his wife being where she was when she died, and one possibility that comes to mind is an adulterous liaison. To him it is quite shocking to even ponder, as he himself has never deceived his wife, and besides she seemed totally uninterested in sex. Asai's imagination is fuelled by the proliferation of so-called "couples' hotels" in the neighbourhood where she died. In addition to couples slinking in and out of these hotels, there are several characters in this novel who have extra-marital affairs.

During the course of his investigation Asai also has to consider other possibilities. He becomes more and more obsessed with wanting to know why his wife had died where she did. He also discovers amazing things about his wife. He knew that she had tried all sorts of hobbies, and that she had been going to a haiku class before her death, but he discovers for example that she not only had a prolific output of haiku, but that it was of an exceptional standard. "*Asai's lack of interest in haiku meant that he'd never paid any attention to the poems his wife had written. He'd felt the same way about the singing and the painting lessons, and hadn't realized that his wife had been such a prolific writer.*" What else had he not noticed about his wife when he was far too busy concentrating on the next rung of the ladder to a successful career? Who was Eiko really? Did Asai truly love her as much as he thought he did?

Asai's obsession eventually leads him take action, and this in turn leads to feelings of guilt which in turn lead to...

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## **Jamie Canaves says**

Being a huge fan of mystery books I've been kicking myself recently for not having been reading more Internationally. Especially when I realize I've been missing out on reading authors like Matsumoto--not only did I get the mystery fix I'm always after but I also got to be immersed in a bit of Japanese culture and daily life as Tsuneo Asai finds that he just can't let go of the feeling that something is off after his wife's death.

Instead of having closure after visiting the shop owner of the store his wife died in he's left even more puzzled, and from there the mystery of who his wife really was begins to build...

I won't say anymore because I so thoroughly enjoyed how this developed and the turns it took I'd hate to spoil it for anyone else but if you're a fan of mysteries I recommend this one.

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## **Pamela says**

Tsuneo Asai is the assistant division chief at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. He is most noted for his precision and attention to detail and his abundant knowledge of the minutiae inherent in his job. He has cultivated this over many years as he is not one of the "elite" educated at the most important universities and from the right background, so he knows that his progress in Japan's bureaucratic structure depends on an excellent reputation and dedication to detail. His life is rather mundane. While on an important business trip to Kobe, in the middle of a dinner party with his superior, Asai receives a phone call that changes his whole life. His young wife, Eiko, has had a fatal heart attack in a small shop in a strange part of Tokyo and he must hurry home.

After Eiko's funeral is over, Asai cannot stop thinking about the circumstances surrounding her death. His wife was a shy woman, fearful for her health, who had never had much interest in the sexual side of their marriage and since her heart problem had stopped sleeping with him, yet she had died in a section of town noted for its couples hotels and had been walking uphill apparently toward one of the hotels. She had been studying haiku poetry for the last two years and Asai realizes that this meant she was out of the house for hours during the day while he was at work. He finally comes to the conclusion that in reality, his introverted wife must have been having an affair. He begins to investigate in order to find the lover.

Seicho Matsumoto is one of Japan's most famous crime thriller writers. this is the first one I've read and it seems to be more of a psychological thriller with some noir aspects. The beginning is very slow with a lot of emphasis on Japanese social interaction, i.e. hierarchy, gift giving, social politeness, etc. Different for a non-Japanese reader yet captivating from the beginning. By the middle of the book, you have the definite feeling that this will not end well but you are never quite sure why or how and the ending has a couple of real surprises.

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## **Luvena says**

A short, yet quite ensnaring thriller - primarily exposing the imagination & suspicion of a recently bereaved husband. A civil servant, Tsuneo Asai, quickly starts ruminating over the circumstances surrounding the

mysterious death of his wife in a strange neighborhood. The suspicion of an unassuming or detached husband and the ongoing paranoia leading to unraveling the mystery.

I couldn't put down this book. Although initially, it felt a bit slow, but given the short read, the suspense & mystery of the plot as well as the inter-connection of the various characters all fall into place gradually giving a sense of decent closure to the reader.

As a woman, I found it easier to dislike Asai, but also owed it to the story set in the 80s where moralistic Asia was still gently opening up to the 'immoral' 21st century. :D However, as a reader, I was able to appreciate the convolutions of the human mind, psyche & imagination that leads to linking ideas and innovating solutions as well as excuses for one's own limitations & faults.

Overall, an interesting read.

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### **Sae-chan says**

Rather than a mystery, I think this book was more of a human behavior study. A prime example of the phrase "one thing led to another....".

Matsumoto-san as always is a master on tempo. Started with adagio, built up to andante, allegro, then abruptly gone.

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