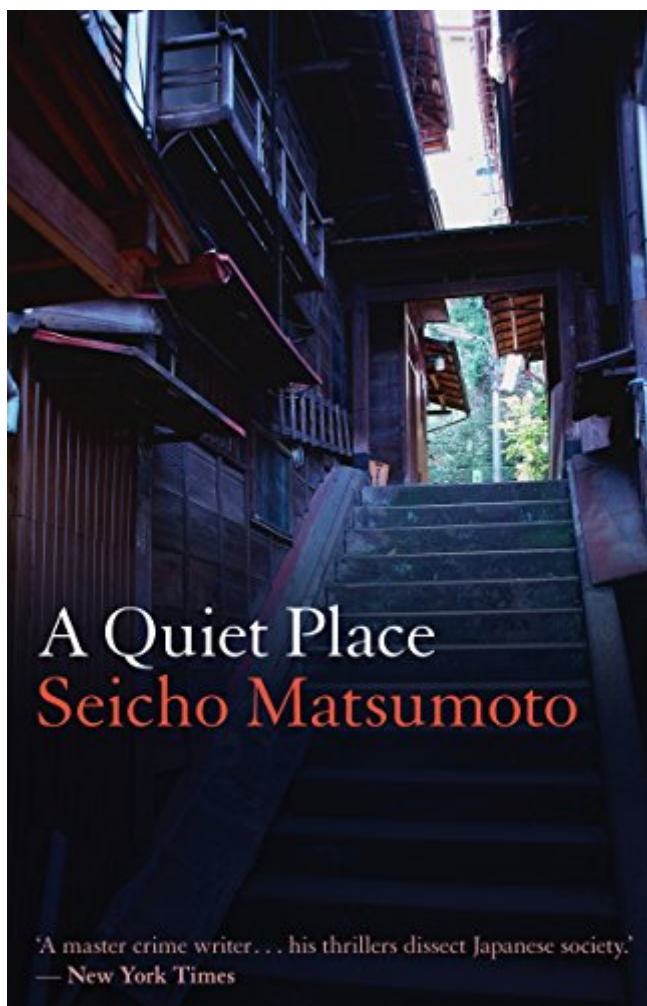


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A Quiet Place



Synopsis

"A master crime writer . . . Seicho Matsumoto's thrillers dissect Japanese society."#151;The New York Times Book Review"A stellar psychological thriller with a surprising and immensely satisfying resolution that flows naturally from the book's complex characterizations.Readers will agree that Matsumoto (1909#150;1992) deserves his reputation as Japan's Georges Simenon.-Publishers Weekly.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 How did it come about that his wife#151;who was shy and withdrawn, and only left their house twice a week to go to haiku meetings#151;ended up dead in a small shop in a shady Tokyo neighborhood?When Tsuneo goes to apologize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... Seicho Matsumoto was Japan's most successful thriller writer. His first detective novel, Points and Lines, sold over a million copies in Japan. Vessel of Sand, published in English as Inspector Imanishi Investigates in 1989, sold over four million copies and became a movie box-office hit.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I just can't knock down Matsumoto. The guy is a legend and a true inspiring voice in Japanese writing. It's truly a shame this story took as long as it did to reach the English speaking world. It perfectly sums up everything I've ever read from Matsumoto in the past. So score one for Bitter Lemon Press and also for the excellent translation work done in those book by Louise Heal Kawai. As for the story, well, it's small but somehow still all-encompassing. What I mean by this statement is that it's a basic plot: Guy finds out one night his wife died in a strange part of town that she would have no ordinary business in, guy suspects wife was doing something she shouldn't have been, guy begins to be absorbed in his own speculations, and then... well, I don't want to say anything more, but I can certainly tell you that the story ends on a semi-humorous note and is, overall, a lesson in karma. A huge, rock heavy lesson too. The questions I kept asking by the end was, "if it were my wife, would I have done the same?" And if all my conjectures turned out to be true about what my wife was really doing behind my back, who would I be more mad at? My wife or the guy she was doing stuff behind my back with? I think you'll have those same questions by the end of reading this story too, except you'll feel just as consumed by quest to know the real truth of what was going on as the main character in the story was. And that's where this book's charm lies: it's one half a whodunit, and the other half a study in obsession and the consequences of not letting sleeping dogs lie. Sorry to be so terribly cryptic, but I don't want to give anything away. This is a great book, truly. It's not my favorite and I certainly didn't love it, because my tastes often go for the much more bizarre or truly unique, but considering how old this story actually is (over 20 years I believe? Maybe more), and considering who wrote it, I have nothing but respect for the plot and what Matsumoto was trying to write about here. And to think... Matsumoto wrote several hundred stories in his time, and "A Quiet Place" is any indication of how good of a writer he is with the small form novel, I can't even imagine all of his works being translated for our enjoyment! Perhaps someday. Definitely give this book a try. It's a great introduction to Matsumoto and the mystery crime universe that Matsumoto liked to inhabit frequently.

It is a book of two halves. The first half is what we have come to expect of Matsumoto with actual plot developments concerning the crime committed. But this comes to an abrupt end and then the

second half of the book is largely reminiscent of Raskalnikoff from Crime and Punishment. Definitely worth a read and would still recommend it to all readers of Japanese crime fiction.

Bitter Lemon Press. A Quiet Place by Seicho Matsumoto A twist on the usual mystery detective story. We know who did it and why. But were they justified in their suspicions? Will they be caught? Can they hold their nerve? For most English-speaking readers, does it matter that the story is set in relatively unknown Japan? As far as the plot is concerned, no. Murder is murder wherever it happens. The delicacy of the writing, and the character of the protagonist are very Japanese. Does that matter? Again, no. Alluring as they are, to appreciate either, again, we need not have lived in Japan. What about the setting, though? The author spends little time on its description. Having lived in Japan myself, I could easily imagine the scenes in the book. But could readers who had never been there? I initially thought not. I realised that I was wrong. The usual brilliant Bitter Lemon cover tells us all we need to know about the story's setting. Dark but attractive, delicate but sinister, it epitomises the small back streets of a Japanese city. And it epitomises the story and the writing.

This compelling mystery comes from another time and place -- Japan in the 1970's -- but the unfamiliar environment adds to the book's power. Mr. Asai, a mid-level bureaucrat, learns that his wife has died of a sudden heart attack. But she died in an unfamiliar neighborhood, under less than clear-cut circumstances. Asai becomes obsessed with the circumstances of her death, starts his own investigation and eventually hires detectives to learn more. In time, he develops a theory of what happened and why, and that is when the real mystery begins. The tone of the book is cool and formal, but Asai is a compelling character, and the suspense grows as the story progresses. Comparisons to Simenon are apt, even though the central character here is not a policeman -- far from it.

great good reading good story

Very interesting psychological murder story with Japanese cultural background.

This novel reminds of a Patricia Highsmith suspense novel. You have to read the story in the context of its time and place. An interesting read. More like a short story feel than a novel. 3/5 stars

the master!

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