

Till Things Are Quiet

Mino Arata

(English Translation by William Andrews)

Part A

A room in a hotel by a beach. In the room is a bed and sofa, along with two people. One lies on the bed, their head hidden from view. The other is facing this way, slouching on the sofa and apparently taking a nap.

These two people are hereafter called, respectively, BED and SOFA.

BED: I am fast asleep. Sound asleep. That said, I can talk like this. Strange, isn't it? Hm. Anyway, I can do it. And I am very happy. I wanted to tell you this, hence I'm talking though I'm asleep. In this lovely hotel room, on this lovely bed. I am so happy that I can sleep here.

SOFA: I can't sleep at all. I watch this person next to me happily sound asleep, but I'm wide awake, just with my eyes closed and waiting for sleep to come. Till things are quiet outside. Once things quiet down, I'll probably be able to sleep.

BED: I hope you get to sleep soon.

SOFA: But trying and trying to sleep like this, with your eyes closed yet definitely awake, doesn't there come a point where you can't tell whether you're actually asleep or awake? Right now, it feels like that's where I am. But that sound outside . . . It tells me that I'm here, in this place, that I'm really awake. Yes, yes, yes. I am beginning to hear a little.

The sound of jet engines gradually gets louder, then fades away. An AIRPLANE opens the door and enters the room.

SOFA is napping on the sofa. Their eyes open, though they seem to be dozing still.

Part B

AIRPLANE: Are you awake? That's all according to schedule. Please look into this camera and tell us what you have seen. Everything will be recorded. Don't worry about the order or how you say it. Just speak freely and however you like. Until I tell you to stop. OK?

SOFA stirs a little. After watching this, AIRPLANE leaves via the door.

Any subsequent dialogue spoken by AIRPLANE will be heard coming from a place that can only be described as “outside” this room. It is treated as if it cannot be heard coming from “inside” the room.

After AIRPLANE’s departure, SOFA presently raises their body a little. It is not clear visually if they are asleep or awake.

SOFA: We . . . We were dreaming just now. But I’m forgetting my dream. We . . . I’m even forgetting where I just was. Where was I before I came to this hotel? To be honest, I can’t remember anymore. The only thing that’s clear to me right now is what I should do next. That’s to stay seated as long as I’m sitting here, but I will ultimately leave this hotel room. Yet I know that that’s now right now. I was told to speak to the camera so that by talking about what I still remember, everyone here, including me, won’t be forgotten, so I will tell you. But I’m so tired, I really want to sleep. I don’t know how much I can tell you. I’m a bit anxious. Yes . . . I already feel like I can’t remember what I just saw. Maybe it was just a dream. So I’ll first talk about that dream. I think I was on a plane. *(Airplane sounds fade in.)* I am now on a plane. The sound of the wind outside is constantly ringing in my ears, but I’m used to it by now. On a plane headed to America. *(The airplane sounds grow loudest at these words.)* There . . .

AIRPLANE *(speaking loudly, drowned out by the sound)*: Sorry! Sorry! It was hard to hear. Please go back a bit and try again.

SOFA: OK . . . I am on a plane. A plane headed to Japan. I . . . we know that that we are going to Japan to drop bombs on the munition factories in order to protect the people who live in our country, and to end the war. I can always hear the propellers, I’m pretty high up. I can see the ground down below in between the clouds, rice paddies spread out across the land. I’m aware that this can’t be America.

Part C

SOFA: I just told you about my dream, but I also just remembered arriving at this hotel. This place is in the middle of rice paddies. Orderly planted cypress trees surround the paddies. I remember that I get hay fever and feel sick. I park my car in front of the hotel’s prominent sign and start walking toward the hotel. I walk for a while and there are solar panels in between the paddies on my left. They are thirty meters long and in two rows, set at angles of forty-five degrees facing south to better catch the sunlight. From the side, they look like the blades of saws. A tractor comes up right behind and drives alongside me. It’s going a little faster than my walking pace. The person on the tractor asks me where I’m going. I tell them I’m going to the hotel up there and they

tell me it'll take over thirty minutes to walk. That's longer than I expected to walk, so I go back to my car. Just as I open the door, it starts to drizzle, despite the sunny weather. After driving for a while, the car window begins to fog up and I am sometimes blinded by intense light. I look over to the side and see that the light is reflecting off the solar panels. The tractor I just saw is driving along slowly in front of me. It's a one-way road. I drive up slowly in my car and reach the tractor. (*Airplane sounds fade in.*) The hotel sign is visible again in the paddies to the right, and I can see a small Statue of Liberty. The sun shines through the gaps between clouds and makes it look like the whole hotel is lit up. The windscreen of the car fogs up a bit, like gentle, hazy, slightly diffused light. (*The airplane sounds become loudest. Pause until they become quieter.*) So . . . to go back to the dream. I'm now at a beach. I can see the sea in front of me. The waves are very calm. The beach is big. I look behind me and the trees and houses seem really far away. There's lots of people at the beach. Everyone is pulling a plane with propellers to move it to a runway on the beach. I meet eyes with a white person, who comes toward me. "Miss Maternity?" they ask. "Huh?" I reply. They tell me it's about to depart. Miss Maternity seems to be the plane's nickname. I realize I am already on the plane. And I then understand that I'm going to fly to America. I might die, or I might live and return a hero. I might become part of a group that will be famous overnight. I had no sense at all that I would die.

AIRPLANE: Is this before what you were saying about your dream? Or after?

SOFA: Not sure. But in both, there was no sense at all that we would die, and before I knew it, we were already flying over the sea. And I could see the light from the solar panels was constantly reflecting from our seats. No, was it the reflection of the sea? I don't remember anything else. Can I talk about when I arrived at the hotel? The outside of the hotel was completely white. The Statue of Liberty was also white, but I can't remember now if that was just the way it looked because of the sunlight hitting it or if it was actually white. It said "Hotel" in red letters and I remember thinking that the red was like the apple I had eaten the previous day.

AIRPLANE: Where did you eat the apple?

SOFA: I ate it on the plane. But the plane was part of my dream, so maybe I didn't. To go back to when I entered the room, I opened the door and walked toward the bed, saying "I'm back."

Part D

SOFA: . . . I'm back.

BED: Hm.

SOFA: You thought I wouldn't come back?

BED: Hm.

SOFA: What you doing?

BED: Going to sleep.

SOFA: Oh.

BED: Yeah.

SOFA: You're a good sleeper. To sleep here of all places.

BED: Yeah.

SOFA: How you manage it?

BED: Dunno.

SOFA: Isn't it too noisy?

BED: Yeah.

SOFA: When I'm outside, it doesn't feel like I'm outside, but when I come inside like this, the outside sounds seem a bit distant and it feels like I was outside till now. Yeah, it's like I feel secure when I'm here in this room.

BED: There's no window, so the image I have of outside comes from the noise I can hear from next door or, yeah, the sounds of these planes. I like imagining that.

SOFA: I think it's noisy. Because I want to feel secure. But there's nothing I can do about it. So I stay here.

Part E

The sound of plane jet engines gradually drowns out their conversation. At the same time as the sound of the jet engines, we can hear the voice of the airplane outside. Unlike the previous voice of the airplane, though, it seems to be coming from the "place." It is a voice that is forcibly amplifying a whisper. A mechanical voice, as if reading something.

After the sounds of the jet engines becomes quieter, SOFA continues talking as if paying no attention to the "big whisper" coming from outside.

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AIRPLANE: Report. I am now on a plane. On a plane headed to America. Report. I am now on an airplane. On a plane headed to Japan. I am now on plane. The sound of the wind outside is constantly ringing in my ears, but I'm used to it by now. I have an apple as an emergency ration. I . . . I was called Miss Maternity. I . . . am pregnant with . . . death. This was the place where I have lived and will continue to live. Once again, I caused a big incident. I wake up here, then sleep again. Likewise, I am born here, then die.

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SOFA: Yeah, but what'll we do? You think we should stay here?

BED: Yeah. Let's.

SOFA: But it's so noisy.

BED: It's OK.

SOFA: You think so? I'm glad you said that.

BED: Can I stay here? Can I listen?

SOFA: Sure.

BED: OK if I talk too?

SOFA: Dunno. Sure, why not?

BED: I might wake up again. But I can sleep like this while listening to what she, who is constantly awake, says, so it seems good to stay asleep. I came to think it would be good if I could also talk with her. So I'm here, asleep.

SOFA: Wh—what? What's up? It's suddenly like an interview.

BED: Because I'm probably invisible to everyone, I wanted to explain, give a self-introduction.

SOFA: I see.

BED: I have learned that I'm training every, every day. Training to sleep no matter loud things are outside. I know that this is normal for me. After all, the gunfire and planes being scrambled will probably go on forever. Even missiles might land in the sea nearby.

SOFA: I see. But I don't wanna be in a place like that forever.

BED: But it's like that everywhere.

Part F

AIRPLANE: Things are getting more and more muddled. Shall we take a little break?
What are you talking about now?

BED: About this room. I'm only talking about what happened in this room.

SOFA: But I talked about when I arrived here, and I want to finish by talking about leaving the room. It might end up a bit like a live broadcast. Can I hold the camera?

AIRPLANE: You must not hold it. Let's go back to what you were saying.

SOFA: The more I talk like this, it feels like I'm waking up. But I'm still sleepy. When did I last sleep? None of the things here seem like they came from this place.

BED: I haven't moved an inch. None of the things in this room were in Tokyo or New York. Only here.

SOFA: I have this strong feeling that I have to leave this room.

BED: Finally, I feel like I can . . . live if it's here, if I'm here.

SOFA: But in the end, we have to leave.

BED: Why?

SOFA: I can't pay the rent. Or rather, the hotel room charge.

BED: Oh.

SOFA: What?

BED: Hm?

SOFA: What's "oh"?

BED: Well, there's nothing to be done.

SOFA: What does "oh" mean?

BED: Sorry.

SOFA: Screw your "sorry." Pay.

BED: Me?

SOFA: Yeah. The rent, the charge for the room.

BED: Sorry.

SOFA: I'm so anxious.

BED: Yeah.

SOFA: So anxious if I can keep living here.

The sound of jet engines fade in.

BED: There's that noise again.

SOFA: The next room . . .

We hear sounds from the TV, recorded sounds. It's like they are coming from the next room.

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AIRPLANE: Juan Soto, an outfielder for the Major League Baseball team San Diego Padres, faced off against Ohtani Shohei in the 2021 Home Run Derby, held the day before the All-Star Game at Coors Field, Denver, the ballpark of the Colorado Rockies. Ohtani had already notched up over thirty home runs in the first half of the season alone, but despite what everyone was expecting, Soto beat Ohtani, leaving spectators amazed at this upset. If we say Juan Soto's name with a Japanese pronunciation, it sounds like "uncertainty outside." When "uncertainty outside" beat Ohtani Shohei, part of me wasn't surprised. But I was also disappointed. My hopes were riding on Ohtani. At the All-Star Game the next day, Ohtani fell short of mine and everyone's expectations, struggling to bat well and ultimately finishing the game without making any hits. Having enjoyed immense popularity until the game, Ohtani seemed to really feel the pressure from the Home Run Derby and, perhaps due to a buildup of fatigue,

slipped into a slump following the All-Star Game. The next year, Ohtani Shohei got his first All-Star Game hit, having declined to appear in the Home Run Derby.

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SOFA: I wanna go back to America.

BED: Yeah. You can.

SOFA: But now I have to sleep.

BED: I have now decided that the sleeping me is not confirming the fact that I am alive, but that I am dying. I don't think about the past when I was alive but only of the future, where I will die. In the face of irresistible power, our lives are merely about dealing with what is right in front of us. Using the desperate nature of our lives as a shield, the outside is always attempting to extend its power. Recently, I've come to think that I just have to live like I'm gonna die if I wanna become able to live here in this room. In which case, we can think of living and dying in terms of the same magnitude, and we then no longer have to think about how to live and so on, which is a nice feeling.

SOFA: I've felt sick for ages. It's noisy outside and the person next door is also loud. Just when I think I want to sleep, there's . . . (*The sound of jet engines fade in.*) There it is again. I can't sleep at all.

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AIRPLANE: You have to climb two sets of stairs to reach this room and I realized just now that the door to the room on the mezzanine, which is always shut, was open. Peeping inside, I found out that the room below the one we are in is actually a very large atrium space. There was no one inside but lots of food had been left on the table, and there was a sign that said "Fundraising Party" at the front of the room. When I returned, I could gradually hear people's voices. It seemed that a lot of people were now in the room, so I pretended to leave and go to the toilet, and peeked into the downstairs room, and there were people inside wearing these badges with the Ukrainian flag. I realize that there's a famous Ukrainian restaurant on the ground floor and many other Ukrainian restaurants in the surrounding area. People are singing the Ukrainian national anthem in the room directly below us.

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SOFA: I once lived in heaven. Heaven was called America. How long have I have been in this hotel called Heaven? There's no point staying any longer. Some people say this hotel is more like hell, but not me.

BED: I know I can't leave this place. Wannabe strong-willed types say I should just leave if it's so bad. But I'm happy being weak.

SOFA: Am I weak?

BED: You should just sleep for now. Sleeping in a hotel that pretends to be heaven is apparently the same as believing you are in heaven.

SOFA: If so, will things quiet down outside?

BED: The sound of those planes. Whenever I hear them, I imagine where the planes are going. Planes are always assuming there is an enemy. An enemy who is not us. In order to protect us.

SOFA: Are we . . . weak?

BED: They are trying to become strong. In a gymnasium where popular pop songs are playing. They're using lots of exercise machines.

SOFA: Those machines are exactly the same as the ones in the Anytime Fitness gym near my house.

BED: That refreshed feeling after coming home from the gym.

SOFA: But I'm really bad at, you know, simply going all out, training for no real purpose, just vaguely for the sake of my health.

The sounds of airplanes outside gradually seem to infiltrate the room. The door slowly opens.

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AIRPLANE: A war is taking place right now. An actual war. But just like here, there has always been war ever since long ago. We don't use the word "war" much. To protect our own country or the country of our friends. To protect family. The things we protect must not be abstract. Preparing to protect a specific someone. Our family, our siblings, our parents, our children. For them, we shoot guns at this firing range every single day. I don't want to imagine the specific person I am shooting. So for the target, I use mass-manufactured cutout paper dolls. I control these on a monitor like a video game, attach the paper, turn to face them, then shoot day after day. I have repeated this for twenty years. I think of specific people I am protecting. More specifically. Assuming an abstract enemy, I once again shoot my gun today.

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SOFA: I've become uncertain who I am talking to. Who will receive the footage filmed by this camera? First all, it's surely the people living in the hotel. But perhaps once things quiet down outside, I will sleep, and will perhaps no longer be able to stay awake like this and talk to the person watching. I've spoken to the camera so many times now, but I can't imagine the specific person you are.

BED: Can you imagine the specific person I am?

SOFA: Does the person watching this and listening to my story actually understand what it is about? This is your story. Do you realize this this story is about you? The story about this place where you are now. The story about the people living here. Where do you think this is? When do you think this is?

BED: You mean, I wasn't you?

SOFA: Yes. Everyone knows you can't talk to someone who's asleep.

BED: Right. I'm asleep. That I've talked to you like this is because I want to tell you about the happiness that is possible from being able to sleep, even if things outside are not quiet. But you will probably be able to keep sleeping here. I think that really is amazing, literally. I hope I was able to get that across.

We hear the voice of the AIRPLANE. Because the door is open, we can't tell it's coming from outside or inside. It is a voice from a halfway phase.

AIRPLANE: Shall we call it a day for now? It's almost lights-out time. The recording is also almost finished. Do you think you can sleep today?

SOFA: Not as long as you are here.

AIRPLANE: Oh, that's a shame.

BED: As long as you are here, I can sleep safe and sound.

AIRPLANE: I'm pleased to hear it. So, let's call it a day.

SOFA: Um . . . Do you know about the people who are watching this record, the video? If so, please tell me. Who are they?

AIRPLANE: They . . . they are the people you love.

SOFA: But who specifically?

AIRPLANE: What would you do if you knew?

SOFA: Perhaps I could sleep.

AIRPLANE: You'd feel relieved.

BED: I'm gonna sleep.

SOFA: Really?

BED: Yeah.

SOFA: Even though I said I'm so anxious?

BED: Yeah. Sorry. While I can still hear the outside noise.

SOFA: Doesn't it make you anxious?

BED: I'm just so sleepy, it no longer matters.

SOFA: Stay awake.

BED: See you tomorrow.

AIRPLANE: Yes, see you tomorrow.

SOFA: You haven't answered my question yet.

AIRPLANE: I'm sorry, but I am going to be scrambled later.

SOFA: Um . . .

BED: Good night.

After a while, SOFA gets up.

SOFA goes over to BED and crouches down, trying to take a peep at their face. At just that moment, the lights go out.

The sounds of the airplane gradually increase, shifting from "inside" to "outside." At the same time, the light from outside the door slightly illuminates the dim room, but the door slowly closes. We see the standing SOFA in silhouette.

At that moment, the door completely closes, followed by a blackout.

As the plane sounds finally fade, we hear an unknown voice saying: "I've decided there's nothing more to be done today."

END