

Exile (Screenplay)

By

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INT. NIGHT, BEDROOM

Screen reads 'Tokyo, March 2012 (One year after Fukushima)'. A Japanese family lay in a tatami bed in a small apartment room. The room is bare apart from a few books and cushions placed on the floor. Atsuko (35) lies on her side facing her husband, Tadashi (40). They are awake and stare at each other while their 6-year-old daughter, Yumi, lays between them asleep. Tadashi has his hand placed over Atsuko's affectionately. Tadashi looks at Yumi.

TADASHI
Beautiful.

ATSUKO
Mmm, takes after her mother right?

Tadashi smiles lovingly with a nod. Then looks back at Yumi.

TADASHI
You cut her hair?

ATSUKO
Yes- 2 days ago!

TADASHI
Hmm. The long shifts at the restaurant...they make me a bit disoriented.

Atsuko raises her eyebrows. She's not convinced but lets it pass.

TADASHI
To be honest with you it's not just that. I've been going over it and I think we should go.

ATSUKO
(pulls hand away)
I thought we talked about this?

TADASHI
We did. And I've considered it further. We can't stay here, Suko, it's not safe. We can't thrive here anymore.

Atsuko is silent as she gently strokes Yumi's hair.

TADASHI
I've found a Permaculture farm near a little town called Pai, in the
(MORE)

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TADASHI (cont'd)
north of Thailand. We can live
there very cheaply. I've already
made arrangements.

ATSUKO
I see I don't have a choice in this
matter.

TADASHI
Come on, Suko.

ATSUKO
When do we leave?

TADASHI
We need a bit of time to wrap
things up here. 4-6 weeks...

Atsuko abruptly gets out of bed and walks to the en suite,
closing the door behind her.

INT. DAY, RECORDING ROOM

Set in a community radio room in Tokyo. Atsuko is presenting
her regular environmental issues show on a Sunday afternoon.

ATSUKO
This is Atsuko Hinari here with you
for the next 2 hours on Environment
Matters, welcome to the show. I was
speaking to a good friend from
Australia yesterday. She told me
about how strange it was that she
had heard about Fukushima on the
news for about week after it
happened, and after that there was
nothing. She asked me what the
current the situation was and I
told her. I told her about how the
government had raised the
acceptable exposure level of
radiation in foods by 20 times more
than what is safe. About how angry
we are about this, and that
parents are now trying to find food
for their children to eat at school
because they don't trust the
cafeteria lunches any more.

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Atsuko pauses and begins to look preoccupied. A quick watercolour animation flicks of a young girl (her daughter) picking vegetables with her grandmother- but as they go to touch the plants they melt away under their fingers. Atsuko snaps out of her daydream.

But I also told her about how 52 out of 54 nuclear plants here have been shut down, meaning we're all forced to reconsider our energy consumption. My friend seemed quite surprised to hear my voice a positive outcome. It made me think- of course the situation is not good but does that mean we shouldn't look at the positives? If we don't, what does that mean for us as individuals and as a nation? More on this discussion after the break.

Atsuko puts down her headphones and lets out a sigh. She looks up to the sound recorder through the glass window. As their eyes meet the camera shows a look of deep concern in Atsuko's eyes.

INT. NIGHT, DINING ROOM

Atsuko and her husband, Tadashi, sit opposite each other at the dinner table in a small apartment in Tokyo. Again, the room is sparse with just a few old pieces of furniture and a couple of small pot plants. They eat in silence for a while, both looking at their plates.

TADASHI

How was the show today?

Atsuko doesn't look up and continues to push food around on her plate as she answers.

ATSUKO

How do you think it went?

Tadashi pauses for a long moment, looking at his wife and waiting for her to look up. When she doesn't, Tadashi drops his fork, leans back in his chair and takes a deep breath in.

TADASHI

I don't want to be the bad guy in all of this. Surely you see that I'm just trying to do what's right for our family?

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Atsuko stops eating and looks up. She narrows her eyes at him.

ATSUKO

What about the rest of our family?
My parents, my brother? Do you
think that us just packing our bags
and leaving is best for them too?

TADASHI

Atsuko, I can't make any decisions
for them. If they choose to stay
here, that's their choice. But I
will not sit around this wasteland
with you and Yumi waiting to see
just how bad the damage is. I
refuse to repeat the mistake my
parents made in Nagasaki!

Their daughter Yumi enters the room in her pyjamas. She's been wakened by the voices. Atsuko get up from her chair and embraces Yumi.

ATSUKO

What is it Mimi? Can't you sleep?

Yumi shakes her heads and Atsuko shoots Tadashi an accusatory glance.

ATSUKO

Come on sweetheart, let's go and
read a story.

Atsuko and Yumi exit the room. Tadashi sits in stillness in the room, staring blankly at the ceiling. After a moment he cleans up the dishes from the table and walks into the kitchen. He puts the bowls down. Their meals are only half eaten.

INT. DAY, CAFE

Screen is black with text reading '2 months later, Pai, Thailand'. Atsuko sits with Yumi in a cafe. The place has polished concrete walls and is oddly furnished with found objects, earthy ceramics and mismatched chairs. She's eating a simple thai lunch while reading a book. Yumi is busily drawing a picture while Tadashi works in the kitchen in the background. Across from her, a tall, well-built American woman sits at another table and watches Atsuko. After a minute she gets up and wanders over to take a seat next to Atsuko. Atsuko doesn't look up.

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SUE

Hey, how you doin'? I met your husband yesterday. Told me you guys moved here recently. Welcome to Pai.

Atsuko looks up and nods but stays silent. Sue continues undeterred.

SUE

How're you finding this sleepy ol' town?

ATSUKO

It's ok. It's beautiful scenery but the people are a bit odd, for the most part.

SUE

(laughs)

Ahh you're honest, I like that!

Atsuko gives an almost polite smile as though she's not impressed but puts down her book, somewhat intrigued.

SUE

Yeah. Lot of characters around here, no doubt about that.

ATSUKO

Seems as though everybody's here on their own kind of exile. The kids who were always the odd one out in class and now have a place to play altogether.

Sue raises her eyebrow and wipes her mouth with a serviette. She crosses her arms on the table.

SUE

If I weren't a loud self-assured Jew from New York I'd maybe start to take offense at this point.

(pause)

So I guess you're one of us now then. What did you run away from? The rat race? Big smoke?

ATSUKO

Guess you could call it that.

Sue sits silently waiting for an explanation.

(CONTINUED)

ATSUKO

Radiation.

Sue nods her head slowly as the penny drops.

SUE

Uh. That bad huh?

ATSUKO

Yes. It's that bad. Well, according to my husband. I'm not really sure how bad it is. None of us really are. It takes 5 years for the real long term effects to show.

SUE

Wow. That's shitty.

Atsuko is silent. She's trying to work out whether Sue actually cares or is after small-town gossip.

SUE

So what's your plan? Hideout for a while and wait for the dust to settle?

Atsuko looks up into the kitchen where her husband is working busily. She watches him for a moment. He senses this and meets her eyes with a smile. She returns it with a small smile and then turns back to Sue.

ATSUKO

(Shrugs)

Not sure.

There's a pause before Sue makes her way to get up.

SUE

Ok then, well if you ever need a hand just shout. I've got a kid too, a 3-year-old boy. Believe me I know how exhausting they can be so it helps to have some backup crew.

ATSUKO

Thanks.

Sue smiles warmly before walking off. Atsuko watches her walk away with a curious expression. She then goes back to her book.

EXT. DAY, FARM.

Atsuko sits under a large bamboo shade structure while Tadashi sits 10 metres away meditating. The sun is slowly setting and sheds a soft light onto the space. Yumi approaches, covered in dirt.

YUMI

Mama can we go for a swim in the pond?

ATSUKO

Sure. Just let me get my bathing suit.

YUMI

Can Papa come too?

Atsuko looks over to Tadashi's still figure with his back is to her.

ATSUKO

No mimi, not now, Papa is meditating.

YUMI

Is that what the men in orange dresses do in town at that big house?

ATSUKO

Yes, more or less.

YUMI

Why does daddy do it too? He doesn't wear an orange dress...

ATSUKO

It helps him. Gives him a bit of quiet time after a busy day in the kitchen at work.

YUMI

Why don't you do it?

ATSUKO

I don't really like it. It doesn't work the same way for me. Besides, I'd rather spend time with you.
(smiles, poking Yumi gently in the tummy)

Yumi giggles from the tickle.

(CONTINUED)

YUMI

Ok. But maybe Papa can come for a swim tomorrow?

ATSUKO

Maybe sweetheart. Go and get your towel.

Yumi runs off.

EXT. DAY, FARM.

As we hear the sound of morning birds an image fades in of the family asleep in a bed, under a mosquito net, in a mudbrick hut overlooking mountains and rice fields. The little girl Yumi then sits up and crawls out of bed, her parents not awake yet. She walks out of the hut, a little way along a path and to the hen house. She squats down and looks through the chicken wire, gripping the fence for support.

YUMI

Here chicky chicky.

She continues to watch them as they move around and 'speak' back to her. She then wanders around to the nesting box, puts her hand in and pulls out an egg. She carefully sweeps away the dirt and feathers, and smiles. Yumi then walks back to the hut slowly, cradling the egg with both hands.

INT. DAY, HUT

Yumi enters the hut.

YUMI

Mama I found an egg.

Atsuko and Tadashi lie asleep facing away from each other.

YUMI

Mama! (louder) Look! The chicken laid an egg!

Atsuko stirs and sits up. As she realises what's going on she motions for Yumi to climb back into bed.

YUMI

Feel it, it's still warm.

Yumi hands the egg to Atsuko.

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YUMI

Careful! You might kill the baby!

ATSUKO

Oh sweetheart, there's no baby in this one. This is one for us to eat.

Yumi looks perplexed and a little mortified. Another watercolour animation comes to life with an egg hatching in boiling water on a stove and a chick crying. Back to the scene. At this point Tadashi awakens and props himself on his elbow, facing the girls.

TADASHI

Why would you tell her that?

ATSUKO

She's got to learn. There's no point in sugar coating these things.

Tadashi shakes his head and lays back down.

ATSUKO

(to Yumi)

Thank you my Mimi. How about you go and put this in the kitchen? I'll be out in a bit.

YUMI

Ok Mama.

Yumi exits the room. Atsuko turns to Tadashi.

ATSUKO

I think we should send her to school. I saw a poster in town yesterday for a new Montessori school that's just opened up.

TADASHI

She's already learning so much here on the farm. She's learning what she actually needs to know- how to live off the land, the interconnected web of life- not the regurgitation they learn in schools.

ATSUKO

She can still learn that when she'd be at home. Tadashi, she needs more

(MORE)

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ATSUKO (cont'd)
stability than this. This is
exactly what I was afraid would
happen...

TADASHI
Why can't you just appreciate what
we have here? Growing our own food
on the farm, fresh air, beautiful
conscious people around us...

Tears begin to well in Atsuko's eyes. Tadashi takes her in
his arms. He rocks her as she cries quietly.

TADASHI
Shhh. Ok. We try the school. I can
run her in when I go to the cafe in
the mornings.

Atsuko nods. Tadashi continues to hold her.

EXT. DAY, FARM

1 month later. Atsuko sits on the front deck of the farm hut
with a cup of iced tea. The car pulls in and Tadashi and
Yumi get out. Tadashi kisses Atsuko on the head and walks
by, while Yumi runs up with a bunch of letters.

YUMI
Mama here's the mail. Today we
painted a picture, want to see?

ATSUKO
I want to see!

Yumi pulls out a painting from her bag. The painting becomes
animated, with Yumi playing with chickens, all of which have
names and talk to her. Then goes back to the static picture.
Atsuko looks from the picture back to Yumi, who is smiling.

ATSUKO
It's beautiful Yumi.

Yumi takes picture and runs after her father. Atsuko flips
through the mail and sees a letter from her mother in Japan.
She opens it and we are allowed to read it.

Dearest Atsuko,

How is everything going in Thailand? I know you worry about
us but we will be fine here. We are old, we don't have much
time left anyway and want to live out our days at home. But
you must always think of Yumi. You are doing what is best.

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Loving you always,

Etsu.

Atsuko looks up out at the rice fields and takes a deep breath in. Screen blacks out and all we hear is a long exhale.

END