

About 100 years ago, there existed a small yet beautiful valley in the middle of Northern Japan. This valley was very prosperous area, made up mostly of forest, and within these forests were trees covered with succulent peaches and other fruits. Many animals roaming the earth, soaring in the sky, and swimming in the rivers, all that streamed out into a large bay of the coast in between the Sea of Japan and the Pacific. In this valley, there existed a quaint village.

Living in this small village, there was an equally quaint family, This family consisted of Akane, a caring and hard-working widow and mother of three, her eldest and only son, Hideyoshi, her middle daughter Aiko, her youngest Aika, and the family pet, Jun. Each member of the family loved each other member like no other. However, there was not a bond stronger than the one between Aika and her mother.

Akane loved her children equally, although she seemed to spoil Aika near rotten. Ever since she was born, Akane showered her with gifts; toys, sweets, clothes, etc. No one ever even realized this seemingly unfair treatment, it just seemed natural eventually. By the time Aika was five, she had an entire room filled with toys and her drawings of her family. While everyone else's attire consisted of mainly of plain single-colored sweaters with worn jeans, Aika got the luxury of a cute scarlet dress and a matching hat.

No one knows why she was treated better, it could have been the rumor of Akane being attracted to her own young daughter. The more accepted and noncontroversial theory was that she felt like she needed to give Aika twice the normal amount of attention due to her being born directly after her father's untimely demise, as she has no memories of her father. However, the true unsolved mystery was why no one questioned it in the slightest. Hideyoshi and Aiko never grew jealous of her, never confronted their mother about this unbalanced treatment. They just believed their mother's words.

"I love you all. None of you are higher in my heart than the other." These words were ingrained into the memories of Akane's children. It made them just live their lives normally, whenever they were down, Akane would just sooth them almost hypnotically to he point where they would forget their troubles.

Their family was the talk of the town. They had a reputation for being the perfect family. But they also were known for being abnormal, their perfection was too good to be true. However, there was another reason for these suspicions...

It was the morning of Aika's fifth birthday, she awoke to the sound of chatter downstairs. She dashed down the steps to find Hideyoshi and Aiko chatting around the dinner table, with a monstrous cake in the middle of it. Aika's siblings turned to her to yell a hearty "Happy Birthday!", but with no reply. Something was wrong; Akane was nowhere to be seen. This made Aika worry a little. She walked over to the kitchen counter to find a present and a small note.

"Sorry sweetie," the note read, "something came up at work, and I couldn't get to see you blow out your candles, but I know someone that can." Aika had no idea what the ending of the note meant, but she was glad her mother remembered at least. She then eyed the large present next to the note. She wondered what could be inside. She needed to wait though, she wanted to blow out the candles and eat first, she was quite hungry, of course.

After the cake, Aiko brought over the present and told Aika to open it. She tore open the present in excitement, and inside, there was a sweet-looking doll, garbed in scarlet red. Aika then realized the meaning of the note, and frowned. She had to open the gift first so the doll could her blow out the candles of her cake. She felt her mother would be disappointed, but it couldn't be helped. She spent the rest of the day with the doll; she eventually realized, the doll looked like her.

Akane returned home late in the evening, exhausted from a hard day at work. She sat herself down in her favorite chair, and closed her eyes to rest. When she opened them, she saw the face of the doll looking back.

"I see you found my gift." she chuckled. Aika laughed along with her, and sat on her lap. Her mother embraced her.

"Sorry honey," Akane sighed, "but I have to go away on a short work trip for awhile." This made Aika frown. "Don't worry, you'll have your siblings and Jun looking after you, and I'll only be gone for three days." Aika cheered up a little. At least she got more time to spend with her new doll. Three whole days...

However, on the third day, Akane had not returned, this concerned Aika. On the fifth day, she still had not come back from her trip, Aika began to worry. A week had passed, then another, and another. Eventually an entire month passed, and no one around the house nor in the

village had seen Akane any where. The population of the village had assumed she was dead. Not only that, but during that month Jun died after being with the family for nine years.

All these events transpiring at once had caused Aika to spiral into madness. She disconnected from her siblings. She spent most of her time in her toy room, only leaving to get food and to relieve herself from time to time. The only one she could turn to was the doll, which she named Kimiko. Aika began to hallucinate, seeing images of her mother nailed to walls with her head cut off, toys and stuffed animals criticizing her for her foolishness. Aika's life became like that of a drug trip.

After a month and a half after Akane's departure, she finally returned home, surprisingly unscathed and with no explanation to her disappearance. Everyone missed her, and there was a village-wide festival to celebrate her return. But no one was more relieved than Aika. She made sure her mother never left her sight again. She would sleep in her bed every night, eat their meals together, spend time in Akane's favorite chair. This eventually led to Aika never needing to play with her toys for an entire month.

A month after Akane's reappearance, much to everyone's dismay, she was forced to leave again. She promised Aika to be back before a week this time. Aika was still worried, though. After Akane left, Aika rushed upstairs, ignoring Hideyoshi and Aiko along the way. When she got to the toy room however, something was off. All her toys...they were ignoring her.

They all faced away from her, as if they didn't want to look at her to avoid telling her a deep dark secret. Even though there wasn't an eye on her, Aika still felt like she was being watched. There seemed to be some force looking at her from a place where they would never be seen by her eyes. Aika was scared for her life, and when she turned around, she saw Kimiko, staring back at her. Aika could do nothing but scream and run to her room.

A week passed, and Akane didn't appear again. This time Aika skipped denial and went straight to anger. She blamed everything and everyone around her. She chose to eat alone in her room and wouldn't leave the house. Eventually, another week passed, and Aika had enough. She had to look for her mother herself.

So she packed some food, water, and other necessities into a small rucksack she used for camping, and headed out at the crack of dawn the next day, onto the trail she saw Akane take a week ago.

Aika had traveled for days, doing nothing but walking and taking some time to rest. She would keep calling her mother's name, but to no avail. After the first day, she already had began to run out of food and clean water, but her determination kept her going. A day later, she happened upon a wide clearing, with no trees and a small stream that became the river that lead to the ocean.

Aika remembered this place, she had come here after running away from home long ago. Akane eventually found her here, starving and cold. She comforted her and took her home, back the perfect life she lived. Aika didn't even remember why she left in the first place.

However, something about this place had changed. There was a small hut with a large tree growing beside it right in the middle of the plain. Aika decided to see if she could take shelter there for now, as it was already getting dark. As she walked up to the small hut, Aika saw the building material it was made from, random scraps of discarded metal, which seemed to be put together with some unknown substance. This gave the hut a look as if it was hastily put together, as if it had a short deadline to be built.

Aika knocked on the door of the shack, multiple times, and there was no answer. She decided she would let herself in, assuming no one was home. The place felt much larger on the inside than on the outside, with several rooms, many amenities including a hammock, a large pantry, and even an icebox, a rare object for the time. There was even a basement level, this made Aika wonder why the exterior was so shoddy when there were so many luxuries that not even she had inside.

Aika spent the night in the hammock, exhausted from her search. The next day, she went around the hut to explore and see if she couldn't resupply her rations. Luckily, the pantry was full of bread, crackers and peanut butter. Plus, she found pickles, jam, and cheese from the icebox, and was able to melt some ice to fill her canteen with water.

Aika was prepared to leave, but then she remembered the basement, she still forgot to explore it. So she climbed down the vast spiraling staircase to the pitch black depths below. As she reached the bottom, Aika fumbled for a light, eventually finding a door instead. The door appeared to have light on the other side of it, so Aika opened it to get a good view of her surroundings.

The light from the other side of the door was brighter than anticipated, as it brought the room to life, which could now be seen as nothing but a small deserted space. However, within the room with the light source, as Aika saw, was shocking, to the say the absolute least.

The other room was a small circular area, with torches lining the walls from every angle. Except for the other side, that is. On the side adjacent to the doorway, Aika saw a picture. It was of Akane with Aika, out in the forest, with Akane's face scribbled out in ink. Despite this, it's what Aika saw in the center of this already creepy room that frightened her the most. In the very center of the room, was Kimiko, holding a dripping ink bottle in one hand, and an ax in the other, and a empty beehive sitting in front of her.

Aika, paralyzed with a flurry of emotions, scrambled and scurried and zoomed up the stairs as fast as her legs could carry her. She leapt out the door, out in the deserted field. She kept running, until she tripped and fell on her face. She then curled up with her head in her knees, and started bawling in confusion.

Where was she? Who built that shack? Why? How did Kimiko get there? What was the picture doing there? How did Kimiko get that ax? Why did she have it? What was the significance of the beehive? What *did* happen to Akane? All these questions raced through her mind, as she stayed there for hours, pondering them all.

Hours later, Aika looked up to see it had gotten dark, so, not wanting to return to the shack, she decided to rest underneath the giant tree nearby. But, to her surprise, she had found her mother resting underneath the tree. Aika was elated, all of the emotional trauma she had suffered over the past few hours seemed to melt of her conscience, as she went to embrace her mother. Aika laid beside her, resting her head on her mothers shoulder, but as she did, Akane's shoulder slumped over as well. Something was off.

Aika turned her mother over, clearing her hair out of the way to get a clear view of her face, her now horrifying face. Akane's face was swelled like a balloon, covered with bee stings. Aika flew back, shrieking in terror. Aika called to her, shaking her mother around, even slapping her, but after several hours of trying and trying, she gave up. She had to accept it, Akane was dead.

Aika decided to lay with her throughout the night, hoping it was all a dream. She would wake up snug in her bed, surrounded by toys, with the inviting smell of her mother cooking

breakfast in the kitchen below. But no matter how hard she tried, reality would come back to her, sucker punching her in her emotions of happiness and love, and turning them into fear and sorrow.

The next day, Aika had a small burial for her mother, and then returned home to tell her siblings of the dire news. As she traveled back, some new questions had popped into her mind.

What happened? Why did Akane have to die? How long was she dead? As she pondered this, she remembered something. There was an empty beehive in the center of the horrible room in the basement. Could this be the beehive that had the bees that stung Akane? Then she thought about the room some more...

Aika picked up her pace, from a casual walk to a hurried pace, to a persistent jog, then a determined run, and ended up as a lightning sprint. She needed to get home, *fast*. As she ran home, Aika noticed some things. There were trees that seemed to be chopped or burned down. There patches of dead grass and unkept weeds all along the path, in contrast to the usually beautiful scenery. This seemed to worsen the farther she went. Hours seemed to last seconds at the pace she was going. Two days passed, and Aika barely ever even stopped to eat.

Aika eventually returned to her home, or at least what she thought to be her home. It was wrecked, some much so that it was nearly unrecognizable. She took some time deciding whether or not to enter, but she had to see if Aiko and Hideyoshi were all right. As Aika entered the house, she saw that it was in worse condition than she thought. Painting was chipped, broken glass and dirt littered the floor. The ceiling was leaking, and even the furniture was broken and tattered.

Aika needed to have a look around. She searched up and down, looking at every nook and cranny of the house for anything strange. All she could find was ripped stuffed animals, demolished toys, and other assorted broken materials. She saw no sign of Aiko, Hideyoshi, and thankfully, no sign of Kimiko.

After a good hour of searching with little results, Aika decided to stop and eat so she could regain energy and decide what to do next. That's when she hear a phone ringing nearby. This was strange, because, she never once saw a phone in the house, or needed one in the rusitic valley town. But she followed the sound, and it was coming from behind a dresser near the

kitchen. Aika looked and found a small hole behind the dresser that she apparently missed during her search.

She moved the dresser out of the way without much trouble and crawled through the hole with ease, due to its oddly perfect size. Aika felt she would get some answers from whatever was on the other side of this hole that had now become a lengthy tunnel. She was only half right, however.

After some crawling, Aika popped out on the other side to find something even more horrifying. Kimiko was there again, in the center of the room, holding the same ax, and the same beehive laying in front of her. Instead of an ink bottle, however, there was a small puddle of blood. And on the wall behind the doll, there was written: **BEST FRIENDS FOREVER. AREN'T WE?**

Aika was beyond petrified. She had realized, Kimiko was truly sentient, not only that, but jealous. She wanted attention, but didn't get it after Akane returned. So she...

Aika shrieked at the thought, and ran back through the tunnel she came in. Those words implanted firmly in her mind. She scurried through the tunnel, dashed to the door and ran outside, only to find Kimiko at the doorstep. Aika punted her across the yard and ran away. As she ran she realized, she couldn't escape, but she had to.

She stopped to think. What would stop Kimiko? Then she thought of it. It came to her from the time she tried to give Kimiko a bath. Aika dashed to the beach, with a determined look across her face.

When she got to the beach, it was pitch black out, but she didn't care, there were bigger fish to fry. Aika hastily took off her shoes and hat and dove into the water, swimming out a couple yards. When she turned around, she saw Kimiko, standing at the shoreline, with the ax in her hand, staring deep into Aika's eyes, as if she was staring into her very soul. But Aika knew Kimiko would never be able to enter the water, so she needed to wait for Kimiko to give in and leave her alone.

Kimiko didn't leave...

Aika couldn't tread water forever...

They never found the body. After weeks upon months of searching, she was assumed dead. The service wasn't long, due to no one around being related to her. The house on the hill was demolished the day afterward. They felt it was necessary to honor her spirit, due to her young age at death. So, everyone at the service was given a parting gift. It looked just like the little girl...