*Upon the vast evening sky; the moon peeked at the horizon's edge. If one were to stare, one would feel a breeze. If one were to open one's mouth, one would taste the seawater salting the air. If one were to breathe, one would be a slight singe upon one's exhale. Something was amiss. Something was... here.*

*For Mika, he took it as a positive. For him, it looked like excitement, smelled like money, and tasted like adventure. With a little adjustment to his bag and suitcase, he had strolled off of the cruise ship's ramp, or in this case, the stairs. Although he was originally set to depart within the next two days, his mind was already tingling to ditch and stow away in this town; after all, his manager could always arrange a flight back.*

*With that, he'd put on his mask and cap, diverging away from the group before making haste to the largest and most expensive ryokan; prayers were made with the hope that they had vacancy.*

*With a camera in tow, he had arrived at the ryokan; for once, he managed to do so with no navigation. all he had to do was look at the largest building -- good work, mika. your fans are sure to be proud of you now. along the way, he had recorded himself going through all the antics; preparation for when he had time to edit and post it to his socials. 'and... done. we'll skip out on the hotel introduction.' with a little pip to his step, he dragged his suitcase and bag towards the entrance before taking a moment to collect himself. another moment passed before he settled his gaze at the door.*

*the longer he stared at the open frame, the colder the chill crawled up his spine. something was firing his senses haywire, yet he dismissed such notions; maybe he was simply getting too excited for such reckless adventure. resuming his path, he strutted through the main arch, dragging his belongings with a click-clack of the wheels against the stone brick. "Tadaima...?" his expression was one of curious anticipation; there had been no one at the main reception, and neither tourist nor staff seemed to be at the front of the house.*

*"...Hello?" his voice, high in pitch, echoed through the empty halls of the building. "...Anyone there?" he was confused; the place seemed open, yet no one had to attend for any new visitors. "I'm looking to book a room for a few nights." as he spoke, an echo of shuffling seemed to come from the eastern hallway. slow, steady, an eerieness had accompanied the sensation. even though he peeked towards the source of the sound, there had been no visual indication of someone approaching. something felt wrong, yet he couldn't bring himself to leave.*

*with a slight flick of his finger, he turned on his camera, the lens shifting in and out before pinging its ready state. another press, he had begun his recording. "...Hello?" his body had turned towards the east, the camera's red light illuminating the dark hallway with a crimson hue. shadows drew from the angle, yet still nothing.*

*The ryokan was old. So old, in fact, it was impossible to actually date its founding. The brochures all spoke of an old Shinto temple being turned into an inn, but few spoke of the temple's history. The floorboards creaked with every step. There were very clear webs being woven by spiders big enough to grotesquely cast shadows against the silhouette of the moon raising over the horizon. It was impossible for the male to have a quiet time as the old building couldn't stop making noises. The 'wooshing' sound of the wind passing through the open windows, or it was the droning sound of cicadas in the distance, the sound of water flowing down a small creek that ran underneath the dining area, or so the brochure claimed. The man with the camera could hear something in the distance, behind all of these droning sounds. Stomping feet in synchronicity. The wind, too, carried with it a chanting that might as well be something akin to a prayer. From its faintness it was impossible to know exactly how far away it was. One of the many weird things about the town, it seemed.*

*After a moment there was a thumping sound followed by the sound of wood dragging against wood as the sliding door behind where the main counter would be opened up, revealing a somewhat lit interior and a figure in white, traditional robes. There were small details drawn on the white painted in a reddish color. A sun. Lines. Japanese characters. The person also wore a headpiece that looked like bandana around their head with a flap of cloth covering their face. The flap of cloth had the kanji for 'protection' written in bright red.*

*The person took a moment to take the headpiece off and placed it on the counter. They were a young woman, barely over 18. She bowed down to the one recording. "Apologize for the wait, mister costumer sir. We rarely have visitors coming in this late in the day. I was busy preparing the meals. Let me make sure I heard you correctly. You do not have a reservation and wish to stay with us for a couple of days?"*

*there was a little hum. the lights at the end of the hallway flickered once. from off to on, before turning off once again. '...creepy.' he wasn't sure if he was at the right place yet he* ***still*** *couldn't bring himself to leave. this time, he'd leave his suitcase and bag at the front, next to the reception seats. camera in hand, he crept closer to the corner that connected the hallway to the entrance. he kept his gaze upon the edge before shifting back toward the end; this time, he saw it. there had been a little child poking their head out, their deep, dark hues staring hard at his position. "...Oh hey!" he was a little too loud, causing the child to hide away from his presence. scared? he assumed so, yet his body had been drawn deeper towards the hallway. "H-Hey little one, I'm not here to hurt you!" with another step, he continued deeper into the hallway, the red led illuminating his path. he wasn't sure where the child went, yet he knew it wasn't natural for them to be here.*

*either something's going on, or he's simply-- suddenly, a voice drew his attention away from the hallway back to the front desk. it seemed that someone had heard him and came to attend for his presence. a stammer of words spilled from his lips as he caught himself. "I-I yes." he was very much surprised as he didn't even hear her approach. "I'm look for a room with full service, like breakfast and bathing, preferably for a week..." his voice shifted into a murmur, his stare locked towards the unique appearance of the female before relaxing once she removed the coverings. it seemed that there had been something happening, yet he wasn't able to understand what the kanji meant specifically. it just looked... unnerving.*

*"Yeah..." he nodded, slowly, turning his gaze to the hallway for a moment before shifting his attention back to the attendant. "I'm also wanting to ask if there's anything interesting to do here, like night time markets or anything of the sort?" with a quick adjustment of his camera, he turned the recording function off -- it seemed like that there wasn't anything of note to capture for now; that child disappeared and the overall creepy vibe vanished with her appearance.*

*The attendant bowed down for a moment and smiled. "Of course. I'll check our reservations to see if we have any openings. You've caught us at a very busy time, however. Hitsuji Village is not known for being a ryokan destination, but we have very loyal costumers that tend to visit the city every summer --" She speaks at the same time she opens a laptop. Against the dim lights of the entrance it was like a flashbang for her. "Apologies for the low lights, we are currently using a generator because one of the power lines was stolen recently. It seems crime arrives even in quiet little towns like these. The city services said it would be back tomorrow evening, so you have no need to worry..." She continued to tap away at the laptop and tuts her tongue to the side of her lips in thought. "Hmmm... we currently do not have any of the rooms with an open air bath. At least not today. Tomorrow, however, there will be a vacancy and we can slot you in for the week." She presses a button and an old fax machine rumbles to life as it prints out a single piece of paper.*

*"I would you to fill in this form so we know can properly check you in." The form had the usual information to be filled in, name, document number, whether or not he will be using a car, where he came from and, most importantly, how he found out about the inn in the first place. As soon as he fills that in, she prints out the recipe. "That will be 91 thousand yen. If you would like to pay now or tomorrow as soon as you wake up. I have made sure you only pay for the upgraded room once you are settled in there." She places a key on top of the receipt, followed by a brochure that says 'Hitsuji Village: town of secrets'. It's a tourist map that details all the different points of interest around the city. "I would recommend visiting the sea side fishermen houses early in the morning. Most of them have turned into restaurants and stores, but some of them still sell the fish that our fishermen find every morning in the bay. It's a very unique experience that you will see nowhere else in Japan." She bows down. "If you need anything, there is a phone inside your room. You type the # symbol followed by the number 9 to contact the reception. Breakfast is served in your room at 8 in the morning."*

*Mika, despite the initial odd feelings regarding this inn would find himself well accomodated if he ever chose to enter his room. The futon was already on the floor. The single room was furnished as it would be anywhere else in Japan. There was a heater if the nights got cold. There was a bug catcher if the mosquitoes ever got too rowdy. For all intents and purposes it was a perfect little ryokan room. The only thing it missed was the outdoor bath that the premium room offered. Given the state of the place, the lights were dim and the heater barely worked. If he didn't know there was at least ONE more person here, anyone, Mika included, would assume that this place was completely and utterly abandoned.*

*Little to no ‘real’ info would be listed in the form, something he planned to do amidst the little adventure he was expecting to experience throughout the week of staying hidden within this town he came across. His entire visage, a black medical mask alongside aviator shades, a dark navy baseball cap that covered most of his hair… it was a recipe for inconspicuous exploration… or at least, avoidance towards being recognized. There was a pause as he murmured to himself regarding the price. For a small, hidden town, he was expecting it to be cheaper. Alas, how could he expect that when there was a literal* ***cruise*** *ship that docks here every now and then. With a sigh, he nodded, leaving his business’s credit card atop the form; hopefully they accepted as such, otherwise he would have to pull out the cash in his luggage. Once the payment had been settled; either cash or card, he would turn his attention away before reaching toward the pamphlet. The title had raised the smallest alarm in his brain; ‘town of secrets’? That sounds like an adventure, yet for them to clearly advertise as such… either they were full of shit or something really was going down here.*

*“Gotcha.” He nodded again, a small humming muffled behind his mask. With her words, he would listen, having swiped at the keys before making his way over to the temporary room. His eyes searched for any weird ‘outliers’ before settling himself upon the little cushions surrounding the short table. His luggage, dragged against the wood, had been left unopened, with his bag kept beside the door. He was expecting to be moved to the nicer premium as soon as he could, with the overall state of the room already sending a little shiver up his spine the longer he stayed. ‘Creepy.’ Indeed, such thoughts were expressed through the staring at the door; although closed, he was feeling like he wasn’t exactly ‘safe’ here, whether physically or mentally. Maybe it would’ve been better to keep his wits about… or maybe his chat would call him a pussy for not following through with his plan. “Alright. You got this, Mika.” With a little self-assurance, he would bring his attention back to his bag. His body would roll before crawling towards the door, hands reaching to pull the bag away from the slider. Once retrieved, he made his way back towards the central table before emptying the contents on the wooden surface. Within held a few essentials:*

*[his phone, power bank, charging cables, spare camera batteries, a flashlight, a few dried zip lock bags of fruits and meat, identification, and two bottles of milk soda.]*

*There had been a few more within his suitcase, yet he felt like he shouldn’t bother yet. A small trip like the one he planned to take would only last for two hours or so. He made sure to spend time within the room to charge everything; even with how shoddy the electricity had been, he managed to finish his prep at nine in the evening. The sky had turned dark, the night shimmering with the light of the moon. Cicadas would quiet, yet the crickets began their symphony. With all his belongings confirmed and all electronics completely ready, he would pack them back inside before swinging it over onto his back. It was time: time to explore. Quietly, he would make his way outside of the room, his gaze staring towards the main entrance and opposite wing of the ryokan. He had a choice; explore the other areas of the building or simply look around the town using the pamphlet as a guide.*

*[He rolled low].*

*With a decision, he decided to explore the rest of the building for now. He was silent, yet he turned his camera on. This time, there had been no red light – the ‘hidden’ mode had been activated. He would crouch behind his sliding door, facing the camera lens towards his features. “Is this working?” A classic, cliché opening line. A smile on his face. “Hey guys. It’s a little late but I’m doing a night-time exploration at this ryokan I’m in.” His words were a whisper, all to start the adventure he planned to take. “Hopefully we find something good.” With a nod, he would turn the camera back to face the door, hanging the lanyard around his neck before approaching the edge. His head would poke out, peering through the dim lights of the hallway as he held his camera in one hand, his phone in the other. “It’s time.” He crawled to a stand, taking careful steps to the other side of the hallway before looking to the closest turn; away from the main entrance, deeper towards the center of the building.*

*The inn was built on top of the mountain, not precariously, but encroaching on the nature within. Mika could clearly see as the rooms were elevated against the mountain side and even if his current room had no outside hot springs, it still had a balcony where he could see the city lights and a bit of the moonlight reflected on the ocean. He could even see the lighthouse's light spinning behind the canopy of the nature surrounding the ryokan. His initial exploration would surmise that the building was fashioned as a hexagon. Where the north and south sides comprised of the walkway/corridor that led to the rooms and the west and east sides were a large hall with tatami and tables where the food was served during lunch and dinner.*

*The inn was quiet as it was, despite Mika crossing paths with one or two other guests that didn't bother to ask why he had a camera on, there was no staff to be seen. It was like the place was abandoned a long time ago. Both the walkway and the dining area had stairs way that led down to the main patio which consisted of the main grounds for the ryokan. The internet reviews said that this place was built atop temple grounds, which means this area might have been, at one point, a sacred garden of sorts.*

*Stone paths, framed by trees, bamboo or beautiful flower arrangements created a winding path that he could follow and easily get lost if he didn't look at where he was going. It seemed that all of the stone paths led to a central area housing an enormous tree. There were charms and ritualistic paper dolls hanged around its lower tree branches. It was painted white from the roots all the way to the canopy. Clearly some sort of religious symbol that remained here despite the grounds it sat on being turned into a hotel.*

*There was even a plaque that read 'This is the Himitsuji Village's sacred willow tree. Its roots burrow deep into the mountain. The mountain nurtures it and, in turn, it nurtures us back. There are documents that imply that this tree has sat here for, at least, 500 years. Please do not trespass'. Behind the tree, stone pathway led to a tori gate framed by two lit lanterns. Probably the only source of light around the entire building. The gate was made of stone and had moss covering its base. It looked like it had been here for a long time. The gate led to a stone stairway that led deep, deep into the mountain.*

*There were no more lanterns on the way up, so he couldn't quite see how far it would go. This was, possibly, some kind of point of pilgrimage. Mika would be reminded that the brochure he was given had points of interest regarding treks one could take. This one in specific was called the 'seventh chakra's enlightening road' which led to another temple called the 'temple of a thousand heads'. From one moment to another he just noticed that there was a lot to explore within the patio grounds.*

*MIka's chat was as unbearable as any chat could be. Saying that they have seen things in the woods. That they have seen shadows creep in front of the camera. That one of the people that Mika crossed had no face. None of that was true, obviously, but the footage would probably hide some odd occurrences here and there. What he couldn't really explain, however, was the filter that seemed to have been placed in front of the raw footage. He could see it on his camera, but if he ever tried to look at the livestream feed, he would see that it was completely normal.*

*The camera, however, felt like it was full of artefacts, like an old film camera. The screen would glitch now and again like the film had skipped a frame. It was weird. Could it be a display setting that he had changed on his camera without realizing? As he continued filming the patio, he would notice something that would make a freezing cold go up his spine. He saw someone. A white figure. It stood in front of the tree holding something aloft in its hands. It wore all white robes and a mask over their face. The mask had some red writings against it, but it was impossible to read what it meant. What's worse, if he looked at the live feed the figure was not there. It only appeared in his camera. Not even to the naked eye.*

*The figure lifted whatever it held above its head. The light of the moon shimmered against metal, a blade. What the figure held was a knife and with a quick jerking movement it stabbed itself on the stomach. Once. Twice. Three times. After the fourth one, it trembled forward, the mask slowly panning to face the man filming.*

*A little scary, yet Mika-ri wasn’t one to shy away from such oddities. He knew, the chat knew, even his manager knew, that such urban exploration was something he hadn’t failed in yet. On top of that, he believed in the fact that most, if not all, footage that had been uploaded online isn’t real, or at least, the person behind the camera hasn’t died yet. In hope, he was expecting that this weird superstition was something that could protect him even in the face of danger itself. Such horrors, such jump scares, such media that had been uploaded on the internet was something that had been pre-mediated or simply explainable through prop-usage in realistic terms. He wasn’t to be trifled with, or at least, he hoped so.*

*With the information that he’s gathered from the quick net searches he made during his charging time, he knew that there were some spots that people had mentioned containing ‘weird’ or ‘spiritual’ energy, the presence of something unnatural there being a prime contender for easy content to be made.*

*“Chat, I know you’re joking, but let’s all behave.” His voice, a mere whisper, had been caught by his lavalier microphone, his hands turning to face the lens towards him. Every time he did this, the chat would explode, timely in nature, as they kept expressing that there was something behind him, something of the spiritual nature occurring where he couldn’t see. With a shake of the head, he would focus the lens back towards the ryokan’s path. So far, he hasn’t seen the child, yet he knew that if they were around, that meant that there were some other occupants of the inn. The dim lighting from the lanterns and far-away lights created an ambience of a horror scene, yet he soldiered on, his steps providing a quiet dissonance to the eerie silence. Even more so, the noise of the cicadas had disappeared, a disturbing thought that ran through the streamer’s head.*

*“Hmm.” His throat was dry. Something is up. A chill? Surely the breeze must’ve blown through an open window. When Mika-ri looked through the camera, he felt his stomach drop. The artefacting became worse. Something was messing with his camera, yet his observation of the stream proved otherwise. Something was amiss, however, he couldn’t put his finger on it yet. The chat can’t see if he’s rattled or not. As he stared into the screen, his gaze halted, his steps frozen as he bore deep into the display. There, a distance away, his camera had captured something near the tree. Contrary to what he expected, the chat spoke of nothing, simply going along with their previous shenanigans of faux horror and slight boredom with the lack of spooky jumpscares.*

*“Chat…”*

*His voice was shaky. He couldn’t hide his rattled expression when he panned the camera back to himself.*

*“…Surely you see this, right?”*

*That throat of his had dried up, akin to a well during a drought. He was frozen, yet he couldn’t help but stand still once the figure turned their attention towards him. That mask, those clothing, that appearance, it was a sign of something that drew his heart to a frightening drop.*

*“The person, the one with the adornments, guys..”*

*He wasn’t sure if he should look away, yet he knew that the moment he looked up from the camera, it would jump at him.*

*Okay. Three. Two. One.*

*He glanced up. It wasn’t there; the fear still was. He didn’t look back at the display. He’s fucked. He knew that one of the cliches in horror would apply to him. [Look away and they’re gone. Look back and they’ll jump you]. This was it.*

*He looked back down at the display.*

*There was that dreaded beat. The drop of water that rips through the surface and makes it ripple infinitely. That one moment where one's heart might sink. Where one's breath might be hitched. The seconds before one jumps off the plane and skydives. That was the single most evil time in anyone's life. Human conditioning forced anyone's body to bear for the worse. To hold onto invisible reigns. It lingered an extra, horrendous and tortuous beat. Nothing. The video showed nothing. No woman sitting by the tree. Nothing.*

*The whole of the patio was deserted. The night vision camera would only show the glossy reflections of the lights against the rocks on the floor and the the cattails by the small creek that ran underneath the ryokan grounds. There was silence, save for the crickets. Even the air that he breathed seemed to be lighter, it didn't clump around his throat. What kind of feeling was that? All sorts of confusing messages started appearing in his chat. "Is Mika-ri stupid?" "There was nothing there...!!" "wwwwwwwwwww the dude is scared of his own shadow." "Who does he think he is? A real ghost hunter?" wwwwwwwwwwww" You can't please everyone apparently. They are all extremely entertained by his reactions, however. The chat. His viewers peak whenever there is something weird. One of the chatters writes. "Guys. I think I saw a woman in white. She was praying 草 this guy is totally faking it." But when other people question seeing the same thing the crowd starts to stop turning against Mika Ri. They ask for him to be careful because this might just be the real deal.*

*Suddenly there is the sound of a wind chime. A bell. The sound of flapping paper against the wind. To his right, climbing up the stairs is a white figure. It holds a Shintoist ritual bell in one hand and a paper kite on the other. It exists for as long as there is light to be reflected against the stairs. Once again people are very confused in chat. Some heard it. Some are questioning if people are trolling. No one is certain about what is happening with Mika.*

*Everything happens so fast. There is a ruffling to his right. Something behind the cattails. A figure. Clear as day. Its hair seemed to be drooping down. Something seemed to be dripping from its long, long hands. It groaned, a pained groan. Like it was starved or thirsty. The night vision camera catches the reflection of eyes staring directly at it. "Uoooh..." A hand is raised towards the man.*

*Mika-ri*

*World of Horrors*

*Mika-ri*

*World of Horrors*

*Mika-ri*

*World of Horrors*

*Mika-ri*

*World of Horrors*

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