

Chapter 2: The Dead Man's House

It was eight in the morning. All of the volunteers were now on the other side of the park, ready for Captain Shino Sosaki to give the order to investigate the Haiboro Woods once more.

"All right," she said. "I know we didn't find anything last time, but let's try to keep our eyes peeled this time around. This is our last day. Okay? Okay. Everyone will be in the same teams as yesterday. Now go, and find me a murderer."

As the rest of the cops went into the forest, Aizawa went up to Shino.

"That was an... interesting speech."

"Look, I didn't have a good night's sleep, I'm sorry if the speech wasn't inspirational."

"Well, if that's the case, maybe you should sit this one out," said Aizawa.

"No, I'm fine," insisted Shino.

"Okay, then," said the older cop, as they both walked into the forest.

In the forest, everyone had their eyes and ears open for anything and everything. Masaru and Takeyama were still uncertain of what was in the forest, Mitsuki and Shino were sure they would find something, and Aizawa and Tatsuma were talkative.

"So..." asked Tatsuma. "Do you really think it's a monster?"

"Sure," said Aizawa. "If it's not in the physical sense, then the culprit definitely will be in the psychological sense. You know how it is with these serial killer types –"

SNAP!

Suddenly the two of them heard something. Leaves crunching. Aizawa singled Tatsuma to pull out her gun, and mouthed to her "on three". They waited for three seconds, then turned around and pointed their guns at the person who made the noise.

A person who both officers had met yesterday.

"Woah, hey!" said Kai. "We really need to stop meeting like this."

"You again? How the hell do they keep letting you in here?" asked Aizawa, angry, but keeping his emotions in check. "The forest is still being searched, you know?"

"Sorry, sir," said Kai. I was just out here, doing my, uh, morning jog."

Aizawa looked at Kai, and saw that he was still wearing the same suit and shirt as yesterday. Weird fashion choice, but whatever, "Okay, get out of here," he said, softly.

"Yeah, sure thing," said Kai. He turned in the opposite direction, and disappeared into the fog.

Let's hope he's gone for good now, thought Aizawa.

After dealing with that annoying civilian (again), they kept walking through the fog. After twenty minutes or so, Aizawa could see that Tatsuma was getting annoyed.

"People like him should know better," said Tatsuma, frustrated.

Aizawa looked at her. "It seems like there's a lot on your plate."

"Yeah, I know," said Tatsuma, sighing, while the two of them kept walking. "It's just that this is my first time physically out on the field, and I want to make a good impression and all, but how can I do that when we don't know what we're fighting is even human?"

"Don't worry. I'm pretty sure we know it ain't human," Aizawa said.

"How?" Tatsuma asked.

"Because we just found it," Tary said, pointing his finger at something.

Tatsuma looked towards his direction and was speechless.

In front of them was a scarecrow. It resembled what Shindo had described, down to every last detail. Its clothes were nothing but scraps, it had wooden fingers, a thin skeleton made of the same material, clawed metal feet, and it had a smiling jack-o-lantern for a head.

"I believe we should contact Shino now," said Aizawa.

Tatsuma nodded in agreement.

Aizawa pulled out his walkie-talkie and called it in. "Captain... we found something."

"Is it something that came out of your worst nightmares?" asked Shino.

Aizawa was confused.

“How did you know?” he asked.

“Because Mitsuki and I just found it,” said Shino.

In front of her and Mitsuki was the scarecrow, just like how Shindo described, down to the last detail, with its arms pointing to the distance, clawed feet, and standing completely motionless.

“*That can't be right,*” Aizawa’s voice came through the walkie-talkie.

“That can’t be right,” said Aizawa. “We found it, it was right in front of... us...”

That was when Aizawa and Tatsuma came to a horrible realization...

There were more than one of those things out there.

“All right, keep wrapping it around, we need to finish that perimeter,” said Mitsuki.

“Is this enough?” asked the female officer.

Mitsuki looked at the fencing and responded. “Yeah, I think that’s enough. Why don’t you two head back to the base? Captain’s coming over here anyway, you two deserve a little break.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” said the other officer, and the two of them left.

It was a few hours since the police teams found the two motionless constructs. Since then, Sosaki contacted the police station, ordered them to bring fencing, and wrapped a six-foot perimeter around the statues. Honestly, those things creeped her out a bit.

Yes, they were nasty to look at. But it wasn’t *just* how they looked.

Whenever she got a bit close to those things (behind the safety of the fencing), she swore she could hear a... sound coming from them. Nothing loud, but about the volume of a whisper. But what it sounded like... she could have sworn they sounded like screams.

But that wasn't all.

Mitsuki was catching her breath from all the supervising, when she noticed something: The creature Aizawa found was in a different position than last time.

Mitsuki thought she only imagined it, and was getting back to work when she heard a sound: A soft rustle, one she could barely hear herself. Someone stepping on leaves?

Mitsuki turned around one more time.

The screeching had stopped, and Mitsuki saw that the statue had its arms through the fencing, like a prisoner putting his hands through the bars. Mitsuki was starting to get nervous, so she conducted an experiment. She moved to a different side of the fencing, turned around for a minute, and looked back again. The creature was on the other side, as if trying to grab her.

Soon after that, Shino came to the area where Mitsuki was, talking into the walkie-talkie. "Team Two, how's it going along?"

Aizawa's voice came through the handheld radio. "*They're almost done.*"

"They're almost done. I gotta admit though, Sosaki, this seems almost too easy."

"So, what in the hell are we dealing with here?" asked Tetsu, wrapping around the fencing.

"I don't know what we're dealing with, but from what we've been told, something dangerous," said Aizawa. "So, we're just playing it cautious."

"Why do I have to wrap this fencing around it? They don't seem dangerous to me..."

"Yeah, well, it will be dangerous if you don't keep wrapping that fencing around it," ordered the older cop. "Remember, these things could have killed a teenager, so... yeah."

"All right, all right..." grumbled Tetsu. The rookie stared at the scarecrow and started insulting it under his breath. "You don't scare me, you goddamn motherfucker...."

When Shino finished, Mitsuki told her to come over.

“Hey, Captain,” said Mitsuki.

“Yeah?” responded Shino.

“Check this out.” Mitsuki had Shino turn around and close her eyes. When Mitsuki told Shino to turn around and open them, Shino saw that the statue Aizawa found had moved.

“Whoa,” was all Shino could say.

“I know, right?” said Mitsuki.

“How long were you keeping that to yourself?” asked Shino.

“Actually, I just discovered it.”

“Great,” sighed Shino. “So the one Shindo described from the attack happened because Makabe touched it, and it can move when you don’t look at it.”

Then, Shino’s walkie-talkie went off.

“*Captain, come in.*” It was Aizawa.

“Excuse me for a moment, Mitsuki,” said Shino. She pulled the walkie-talkie out of her pocket and brought it to her ear. “Come in, Aizawa. Do you have an update?”

“*We just finished fencing up the creep in our area,*” said Aizawa.

“Good to hear, Aizawa.” responded Shino.

“So, Captain...” Aizawa spoke into the walkie-talkie. “What do we do now?”

“*I don’t know. There isn’t exactly an agency that deals with monsters.*”

“True,” Aizawa responded, “But we can’t just leave them here. Anyone who stumbles across one of these things could die. And I doubt we can guard them all the time...”

"You're right," Sosaki said. *"We'll think of something."*

"Ya ain't so tough!"

Suddenly, Aizawa heard the voice of the rookie. The older officer immediately turned around and saw that the rookie was pointing at the statue through the fencing.

"NO, DON'T –!!!"

Too late.

The creature's arms went through the fencing and grabbed the rookie,

Then the screaming began.

"BRRREEEEE!!!!!"

The sound was heard throughout the forest, and Shino immediately called for Aizawa. "Team Two, are you there? Come on, Team Two, answer me! Aizawa? SHOUTA!!!"

Shino immediately started running.

"I want all teams to send one officer from their area straight toward the sound!" Shino shouted into the radio, as she kept running as fast as she could to Aizawa's area... but it was too late.

All she found was the rookie's leftover remains.

Both the creature and Aizawa were missing.

She called into the walkie-talkie. "Aizawa, are you anywhere? Come in."

No response.

"All units, keep an eye out for both Aizawa and that thing," she said. Soon enough, Masaru and Tatsuma appeared in the area, putting away their guns as they saw that it was all calm.

"What happened?" asked Masaru.

"I think the rookie got cocky and approached the creature," said Shino.

Tatsuma examined the corpse. "From the looks of it, the officer was Tetsu. I heard he had a real attitude. But still... he didn't deserve this.

"I want the body sent to the morgue. Masaru, contact Tsukauchi at the station, tell him everything," said Shino, as she began to walk away. "I'm going to find Aizawa."

"Hold on, you can't go alone," said Masaru. "We can help you!"

"Look, I'm glad that you're concerned, but Aizawa could be in danger, and I have to find him."

"Captain, the fog is rolling in, you won't be able to see twenty feet in front of you –"

Tatsuma didn't get to finish, as Shino cut her off. "I'm going, as Captain."

There was a silence between the three of them, for a moment, but then Masaru spoke up.

"Good luck," he said.

Tatsuma nodded in agreement, and with that, Shino walked deeper into the woods, as the Bakugou patriarch hoped that Captain Sosaki's judgment was correct here.

He knew she would need it.

"Aizawa? Aizawa, where are you?" yelled Shino, with no results.

It was starting to get to her.

It had been ten minutes since Shino went into the forest, and she wasn't getting any closer to finding Aizawa. "Aizawa, if you can hear this, come in!" she said into the walkie-talkie.

Still nothing.

"Where could he be? He couldn't have just disappeared –"

Suddenly she heard something that made her freeze in her tracks.

It was rustling. Nothing loud, it was soft pitter-patter. As if someone was walking.

Shino looked around to see what was causing it, but could see nothing with the dense fog. *It must be my imagination*, she thought to herself. Before she could walk away however, she saw something that made her stop in her tracks.

She saw two of the motionless monsters in front of her, one closer than the other. Their arms were reaching out, almost as if they were trying to grab her. Instinctively, she backed away from the two statues, keeping an eye on them. Once she got far enough, she turned around, but before she could bolt away, she saw behind her a third one.

Shino was frozen. She knew that the two of them behind her were moving towards her, but if she took her eyes off the one in front of her, she would die. She needed to think of a way out quickly, while there was still a chance. Then, she thought of something.

She started spinning. In her mind she thought that if she spun fast enough, she would be able to slow them down long enough to escape. She kept spinning and spinning, looking at all three of the statues simultaneously, when she saw her opening and quickly taking it.

She ran towards a tree, and as soon as she got there, she turned around and stared down all three of the monsters, now that they were all in her direct line of sight.

Sure enough, they were all frozen. They couldn't move as long as Shino was looking at them. They were at a disadvantage.

As she kept staring at them, Shino breathed a sigh of relief, and immediately tried to contact her team. "Hello, can anyone hear me? I found three more of those things, I need back-up."

No one responded. No one could respond, she was out of range. She was on her own.

"You've got to be kidding me."

To make matters worse, the sun was starting to set.

I have to find shelter, she thought. She decided that going the way back would be too dangerous, considering it was currently blocked by those three monsters. She decided it would be safer to take the long way around, and she was off on her way.

As for the three monsters, they did not move. They knew that the direction Shino was heading would definitely leave her trapped. They knew that if they waited they would be able to run her down and kill her soon enough. They knew that all it was, was a matter of time.

The sun had almost set.

There were no noises of any kind around the area. It was empty, uninhabited, almost lifeless.

Then, there were noises.

The sound of leaves crunching, and the sound of heavy breathing. There was someone in that area of the woods. Someone who was running as fast as they physically could.

It was Shouta Aizawa. Who was currently having the worst day of his life.

Running. Panting. Running. Panting. That was what Aizawa was doing at the moment... had been doing for a while now. Running from the monster and panting from exhaustion.

When Tetsu touched the creature and it attacked him, Shouta Aizawa's survival instincts kicked in. He dropped everything he was holding and ran, thinking that if he ran far enough, the monster wouldn't notice.

Now, it was getting dark, and he was tired.

To make matters worse, he was lost and he didn't know what to do now.

"Shit," was all he said.

Aizawa needed to think.

The fog wouldn't let him see twenty feet in front of him, so it would not be good for him to be in the forest with an enemy who had the advantage. He also dropped all of his equipment on his run, so there was nothing to protect himself with.

He needed a place to make it through the night.

Aizawa started thinking.

C'mon, Aizawa, think! There's got to be a place I can lay low.

Then he thought of it.

The house! Aizawa remembered that in the transcript Sasaki and Bakugou got from Shindo, he mentioned they were looking for a house that was in the forest.

That's where I gotta go, Aizawa thought. As he went on his way he stopped and heard something. Leaves crunching. Aizawa immediately turned around and saw a figure of a man with two bright yellow eyes, staring at him from a distance.

“WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?!” Aizawa shouted, demanding an answer.

But the figure simply disappeared into the fog.

I must be seeing things, Aizawa thought. Still, I gotta get to that house.

Aizawa continued to walk, hoping that he would find that house before he was picked off by one of the monsters in the forest surrounding him.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the forest, the sun had set, and Mitsuki and Masaru were sitting near the cages, waiting for either Shino or Aizawa to return.

“Yeah, we’ll call you if we need you, Tatsuma,” Mitsuki spoke into the radio.

“So.” Mitsuki looked over to Masaru. “Should we go after them?”

“What? No,” answered Masaru. “If we go out there yelling for Shino and Aizawa, there’s a good chance that every freak monster within earshot would make a direct beeline towards us.”

Mitsuki wasn’t convinced.

“Still, we can’t just leave them,” argued Mitsuki.

“We’re not,” said Masaru. “We’re waiting here, in case they come back.”

“That’s assuming they aren’t lost. This forest is huge!”

“Look, it’s not my fault that our Captain decided to go into the monster-infested woods by herself,” said Masaru. “It was her decision, and as the junior cops, we have to respect that –”

Suddenly, both of them heard something.

It sounded like someone was making noise, but it was so soft, they could barely hear it. They both stood up and pulled their guns out, almost instinctively, and waited. After a few seconds of standing there, hearing the same noise on repeat, until... it just stopped.

“Huh,” said Masaru. “You know, for a second there, I thought we –”

But before Masaru could finish, he and Mitsuki heard the noise again, but louder.

Something was running towards them. It was another one of the creatures, with its cat-like feet creating noise all around the ground, it had to be. Mitsuki and Masaru looked into the direction the noise was coming from, and saw dark yellow, almost orange, lights.

Suddenly, out of the darkness, the creature emerged with rapid speed.

Masaru and Mitsuki both had their guns out, ready to use them, but the scarecrow simply ran past them, ignoring them. As it went back into the darkness, only the sound of its footsteps could be heard, and only the hue of its yellow eyes could be seen in the fog.

Mitsuki and Masaru both looked at each other, nodded, and followed the creature.

“Tatsuma, we need you to stand guard where we were; Masaru and I found another one of the creatures, and were pursuing it,” Mitsuki said into the walkie-talkie. “Okay, thanks.”

With their last-minute request done, the married couple continued their chase. As they were running, Masaru asked Mitsuki a question. “They can run? I thought they couldn’t run.”

“We don’t know anything about these things, for all we know they could be toying with us,” Mitsuki responded. With their target disappearing into the darkness, Mitsuki and Masaru picked up the pace, as they both followed the creature’s yellow light even deeper into the forest.

Shino kept walking, thinking to herself, *You gotta live. Think of Kota...*

Her knees were tired, as was her mind and spirit. Shino chuckled at herself to the realization that she might actually die of exhaustion before an actual monster attack.

Alright, the joke's over, I've got to get serious, she thought, *I could actually die out here.* Shino kept calling Aizawa’s name, still hoping that she could save her friend. “Aizawa?”

Nothing.

“AIZAWA!”

Still nothing.

“SHOUTA!!!”

But before she could say his name again, she saw something that made her stop thinking of everything altogether. She had found what the boys were looking for.

She had found the dead man's house.

It was a house with a metal fence, or at least, most of a metal fence surrounding it. Inside the fence, there were trees, with lanterns hanging on them, though dimly lit. Despite the low light, she could make out a few things about the house. It was three stories high, and at least two decades old. And for some reason, the wood made it look like it was burnt.

Why was it burnt?

Before Shino could ask any other questions, she heard something from far away.

Footsteps.

She looked behind her, and saw nothing. She turned around fully, and took a few steps back. She slowly walked backwards, nearing the entrance of the house, she saw yellow lights coming her direction, and then finally she saw what was causing those noises.

It was another one of the monsters. Shino immediately went inside the house and hid. She closed her eyes and prayed it didn't find her. All she could hear was the banging of its metal feet, frantically going every which way, almost as if it was looking for someone.

The banging started to fade, and Shino opened her eyes. She slowly lifted herself...
...and saw that the creature was still there.

She immediately ducked behind the window again. Her heart was beating so fast, that she thought she would have a heart attack. Shino mustered up the courage to look out the window again, and saw that the creature was still there, standing still... looking at her.

Shino quickly made out the scarecrow's figures, and sure enough, it looked exactly like all the other ones from Shindo's drawing. But there was one thing she didn't understand.

What's it doing there?

Shino wondered why it wasn't rushing in for the attack, when she realized its motive: It was waiting for her to come out. The creature must have known that Shino eventually had to leave, so it would wait outside, until Shino either came out or starved inside the house.

It didn't matter to Shino. It was a shelter, plain and simple.

I can play the waiting game, too.

She moved from the entrance of the house into the hallway, and saw that on the floor junk was strewn about. *What happened here? And why would a person build a house in such a place?*

Shino didn't bother asking any other questions. She went up to the third floor and into one of the bedrooms. It had a crib in it. *Okay, a family lived here. But why?*

Shino went into another one of the bedrooms, and there was a queen-sized bed, further confirming to herself that a family did indeed used to live here.

Shino started to feel off all of a sudden. Her vision was getting darker. She could feel herself falling onto the oddly comfortable bed. *Exhaustion*, she figured.

She was glad that she could finally rest, but she still couldn't shake the feelings that Aizawa's life could be in danger, as well as her own. She needed to leave as soon as possible.

Okay, I can rest for a few minutes, and then I need to get out of here...

Out cold.

As Sosaki was sleeping peacefully, the motionless monster was still in the front of the house.

SNAP!

It heard the sound of leaves crunching, and started to twitch, as if it was ready to strike. It turned around, ready to go in for the kill, but then stopped. It recognized the newcomer.

"Woah, hey, calm down, it's just me. Now come on, we have work to do."

The monster followed the man into the house, moving unnaturally, as it followed him into the door, through the hallway, and walked down to the dark basement.

As he went down into the basement, it started to make noise. The sounds of deep growling, the creaks of doors and metal, and the sound of a music box all came down from there.

Out of the shadows came another one of the scarecrows. "Hey, guys. I'm so sorry that I'm late, I had to keep track of a straggler," said the man to the other creature.

"Anyway, the others should be here soon. Let's get to work."

Masaru and Mitsuki were still chasing after the speeding creature, but they were starting to get tired. "Why... isn't that thing... slowing down?" asked Mitsuki, between pants.

"I don't think it has lungs, or it would have been exhausted by now," answered Masaru.

Mitsuki groaned. "Whatever the case is, we still need to track it down."

Masaru tried to talk, but couldn't. "Easy... for you... to sayyy..."

And with that, he collapsed to the ground.

"Masaru!" yelled Mitsuki. She went straight to her husband, letting the creature run off into the night. "Masaru?" All Masaru did was point in the direction of where the creature went.

Mitsuki looked forward, and her eyes widened.

It was a house.

Burned, surrounded with whatever fencing was left, and a creature making its way into the house. Mitsuki picked up Masaru and they both followed the creature into the house. Inside, she could see the creature going directly into the basement, with Mitsuki and Masaru following it.

They went down the stairs, pulled their guns out, and... it was gone.

"Where the hell did it go?" Masaru asked.

"I'm wondering the same thing," Mitsuki answered. The basement had few things in it, but it could all be considered evidence, at this point. There was a furnace on one side, along with a large locker, and something else was on the other side, but Mitsuki couldn't tell. Blocking her vision were cinder bars used for support, but next to them were cell doors, the kind used in prisons. Mitsuki started to wonder. *What was the owner here keeping?*

"All right," Masaru said. "Let's split up and find this creep."

Mitsuki nodded, pulling out her gun. They both moved slowly, unsure of the new area they were in. The only light they had was that of their flashlights. Signaling each other, they make their way towards the other side of the basement, past the cell doors, and to the other side.

What was waiting for them was yet another door.

"I'll open it," said Mitsuki.

“Hold on, how do we know that freak won’t just jump out at you? We need a plan –”

“BRRREEEEEE!!!!”

Before he could finish, the monster they had followed into the house surprised them from around the corner, screeched, and hit Masaru’s face, effectively knocking him down.

“MASARU!” screamed Mitsuki. She pointed her gun at the creature, ready to fire. But something stopped her. She heard something coming from behind her. A voice. A human voice.

“Oh, I wouldn’t do that,” said the voice. “The second you turn around, he will kill you. Now, I would suggest that you put down the gun. Unless you wanna see your friend die, of course.”

Mitsuki slowly put the gun down.

“Good,” said the voice. “Now hands behind your back.”

Mitsuki put her hands behind her back, as instructed. She heard footsteps coming her way.

He must have come from the door, Mitsuki thought.

The voice was now closer. “Stand aside, girl.”

The growling scarecrow behind Mitsuki moved, and Mitsuki could feel her hands being tied.

“Could you at least tell me who you are and why you’re doing this?” asked Mitsuki, annoyed.

“I’m sorry, I can’t tell you that,” responded the man. “In fact, the only guy who might have any clue of what’s going on is that friend of yours walking around the forest, last time I saw him.”

“Aizawa?”

“Uh, yeah, him. And probably the girl.”

“You know, you’re not gonna get away with this,” Mitsuki threatened. “Your pets murdered a kid, and an officer, not to mention that you just kidnapped my partner and I. I can promise you our friends won’t stop searching until they bring you down and save us.”

“No. I assure you, you won’t make it to see tomorrow. After the smoke clears, we keep on living our lives. Well, we will. Uh, well, not you. You’re gonna have to die,” her captor said. “They’ll try to find us, but won’t be able to, and eventually move on with their lives.”

The figure moved on to tying up Masaru, who was still unconscious. Mitsuki got a good look at her captor: Yellow, piercing eyes, a normal-looking face, who wore a button-down shirt with a tie, and kept his short, brown hair messy-looking. If Mitsuki saw him under normal circumstances, she would probably mistake him for a normal person.

“Well, that should do it,” said the man, standing up, and walking away. “Now, if you’ll please excuse us, we have your friend to bring here.”

As he left, he pointed to the two scarecrows. “You two, come with me.”

And with that, the three of them left the basement and the house.

Wonderful. Tied like a hog and lying on the floor. Mitsuki scooted over to Masaru who was now waking up. “Oh my God... I feel like I got punched in the face by a tree...”

“Masaru? Masaru, it’s me, Mitsuki. Are you all right?”

“I think I might have a concussion. What happened?”

“You got knocked out by one of the monsters. After that some guy tied us up, and now he’s on his way to nab Aizawa, and kill us all,” the blonde woman summarized.

Masaru took in all of the information from his wife at face-value, and responded with possibly the most appropriate response he could come up with at the moment.

“I hate this place.”