

KODAMA

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FADE IN:

EXT. EMPTY PLOT - DAY

The sun blares bright on a small, undisturbed plot of land. The plot sits in between two modern, sleek and expensive looking Japanese houses, like the one from Parasite, but made to accommodate the middle class instead.

In the middle of the plot, a large JAPANESE MAPLE TREE stands tall and proud. Its branches extend up into the sky as if trying to reach the sun, and the trunk is as thick and strong as a four lamp posts tied together.

The roots from the tree run under the entire plot and they protrude over the ground, as if vines holding onto the earth.

The tree is mesmerizing, with an aura that exudes out-of-this-world-ness.

The sound of MEN TALKING can be heard faintly. It becomes louder and louder as the breeze stops.

MAN 1 (O.S.)

Alright, boys. It's a green light to tear it down.

A chainsaw WHIRS ominously.

A BURLY MAN (Japanese, 30's), steps forward towards the tree. He's a construction worker and holds the chainsaw. He is about to tear into it when he stops.

The chainsaw powers down for a second as he stares at the tree in awe.

BEN (O.S.)

Is something wrong?

MAN 1 (O.S.)

Son, chop, chop, no time to waste.

The Burly Man snaps out of his trance, confused. He turns the chainsaw back on and begins to slice the tree in half.

A piercing SHRIEK fills the air as he does, but it mixes with the sounds that come from the chainsaw.

The Burly Man stops, it's almost there, just one more push.

BURLY MAN

Boss, do you want the killing blow honor?

BEN (O.S.)
Umm...sure? Why not.

BEN (Japanese, 45), a twig compared to the worker, clean cut architect with no backbone, steps towards Burly Man.

He awkwardly stands in front of the chainsaw and looks at the Burly Man for guidance.

The Burly Man turns the chainsaw back on and it sends Ben flying to the left with it.

The Construction Workers LAUGH kindheartedly as the tree slowly CREAKS and CRACKS, slowly falling to the ground.

Burly Man helps Ben up, who dusts himself off and tries to keep his composure.

Burly Man and Ben walk back, away from the tree. Behind them, the tree stump watches.

MAN 1 (O.S.)
Congratulations, Mr. Kimura, on
breaking ground on your new home.

A dark brown sap comes up from inside the stump and overflows. It falls from the stump and continues to drip meaningfully from the stump and the now severed top half of the tree.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

SUPER: A YEAR LATER

A Honda N-Box drives down a Japanese country road. To its left, small houses line the road.

Inside the car sits Ben as he drives behind the wheel. He has not changed in a year.

Beside him sits his wife SATOMI (Japanese, 46), a cutthroat mother and controlling head of development of the architecture firm, as she sleeps soundly.

Behind them, their daughter MISAKI (Japanese, 17), annoying kind but overwhelmingly indecisive, as she plays Animal Crossing: New Horizons on her Nintendo Switch.

BEN
We're here.

Satomi is startled awake as the car comes to a stop.

Ben and Misaki get off the car, excited, while Satomi takes her time.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Ben and Misaki stand in front of the house. Ben holds up a picture of what the plot looked like before, the tree thriving in the center of it.

He lowers the tree to reveal a two story, modern Japanese house.

Misaki is unimpressed by the new house.

MISAKI

It's okay.

BEN

What do you mean "okay"? It took us a year to build it.

MISAKI

Why did you chop down the tree?

SATOMI (O.S.)

Calm down, Misaki. It's not like we chopped down the entire rainforest.

Satomi, arms full of bags, walks up to them and drops the bags at their feet.

MISAKI

I'm just saying it would've looked nice incorporated into the design.

Satomi goes back to the car.

SATOMI (O.S.)

(sarcastic)

You know what else would've been nice? One of its heavy branches breaking off and destroying our roof.

MISAKI

Now who's being dramatic!

Satomi comes back with more bags.

SATOMI
Be useful and help me take these
inside.

MISAKI
Yes, mom.

Misaki picks up a few bags and follows Satomi towards the house.

Ben stands back and looks at the house, pride in his eyes.

MISAKI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(messing with Satomi)
I don't have to cut down trees in
my game to build houses!

SATOMI (O.S.)
Then the game isn't realistic.
(beat)
Are you coming, honey?

Ben snaps out of it and picks up the remaining bags. He rushes to catch up with his family.

On the grounds around the house, the roots from before are bigger and start to leak drops of dark sap.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The inside of the house appears to be made from recycled materials but it has no furniture yet.

Ben, Misaki and Satomi sit on the floor around an electric grill. On the grill, an array of vegetables and a few slices of chicken SIZZLE.

Ben cuts the pieces of chicken into pieces with scissors. He puts the scissors down and picks up a few pieces with chopsticks. He offers them to Misaki.

MISAKI
Oh, no. I'm not eating meat,
remember?

BEN
When did you make that decision?

MISAKI
Last week.

BEN
But we had eggs this morning?

MISAKI

Dad, I still eat eggs. I'm not
vegan...not yet, at least.

Satomi rolls her eyes in disdain. Her phone RINGS loudly
beside her. She picks it up and walks away.

MISAKI (CONT'D)

I thought she wasn't working until
Monday?

Ben remains silent, he focuses on the food.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Satomi enters the kitchen with her phone on her ear. She
doesn't turn on the lights, instead she heads for the sink.

SATOMI

Hello?

Silence.

SATOMI (CONT'D)

Is there someone there?

One of the bags from earlier sits beside the sink. Satomi
reaches inside and takes out a mug that faintly reads "I
heart trees".

She turns the sink on and pours water into the mug.

SATOMI (CONT'D)

Listen, I don't have time--

HEAVY BREATHS can be heard on the other side of the line.

KODAMA (V.O.)

(in Japanese)

Time...I didn't have time...

Satomi drinks from the mug.

KODAMA

(in Japanese, song like)

Please, Wood-molder. Please don't
cut that tree. A little bird is
singing, outside my window.

(beat)

She lives in that tree. Please
don't cut her home.

Satomi SPITS out the liquid. She looks down into her mug and instead of water, she sees a dark muddy substance mixed with dead bugs and sticks. She flinches and drops the mug which falls on the floor and SHATTERS into tiny pieces.

SATOMI
(under her breath)
Great.

BEN
Are you okay?

SATOMI
I'm fine. The pipes are clogged. We don't have clean water.

Satomi puts down her cellphone on the counter, dismissive of the caller. She kneels down to pick up the pieces.

The HEAVY BREATHS continue, louder now. From the faucet, the dark sap drips down slowly.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

The lights are off in the entire house. Ben, Misaki and Satomi sleep inside sleeping bags.

Outside, the gentle rustle of a thunderstorm approaches slowly.

Satomi twists and turns in agony. She wakes up with a start, nauseous.

She crawls towards the bathroom hastily as she tries to hold back the contents of her stomach.

The commotion wakes up Ben.

He slowly comes to as Satomi throws up violently in the bathroom.

At the sound, Ben immediately stands up and rushes towards his wife, concerned.

BEN
Satomi! Are you alright?

INT. HOUSE - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ben walks towards the bathroom but just as he's about to enter, Satomi shuts the door.

BEN

Honey, I've seen you worse than
this--

He stops abruptly. Something catches his eyes. He looks down at his feet and notices a thin layer of sap over the floor.

Confused, Ben walks towards the kitchen as Satomi continues HURLING in the background.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ben enters the kitchen and turns on the lights. The lights FLICKER softly, emitting an eery glow.

The sink is now overflowing with sap, which covers the entire kitchen floor. The sap glistens under the faint light.

Suddenly, a SWISH is heard.

Ben jumps back in pain. He raises his hand to see a deep slash cut on the back of it.

Another SWISH. Ben jumps back in pain, but the sap has solidified around his feet so he can't move. He falls forward but manages to stabilize himself on the kitchen island. He stands back up straight and looks around the room.

BEN

Who's there?

Another SWISH.

In the background, Satomi has stopped throwing up. A low SHRIEK slowly fills the air as the SWISH sounds continue, quicker and closer together.

Ben YELLS in pain, cuts appearing all over his body like the ones you get when you try to get through a bush full of thorns.

He loses his balance and drops to the ground. The sap quickly moves over him and solidifies and stops him from moving.

From the shadows in front of him, a WOMAN emerges from the sap, as if coming up from underneath water. She is a Kodama, a tree spirit and she is very angry.

Her entire body is made out of the sap, small leaves, sticks and bugs are caught in her body.

She moves towards Ben and kneels down beside him.

Ben tries to yell again, but the Kodama kneels down in front of him and slathers sap over his mouth. The sap hardens and Ben can't breathe anymore.

KODAMA

(in Japanese, song like)

Please Woodcutter...please don't
cut her woods. Please don't cut her
home...

Ben, terrified, gags for air that will never come. The Kodama looks deep into his eyes as the sap covers him completely, like a caterpillar in a cocoon.

The Kodama stands up and slowly walks out of the kitchen.

INT. HOUSE - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

The bathroom door CREAKS open as the Kodama walks past to reveal Satomi slumped over the toilet bowl. Her mouth covered in sap vomit and sap tears coming out of her eyes.

The sap on the floor slowly moves up her body.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lightning CRACKS loudly in the distance.

Misaki springs awake. She breathes heavily.

MISAKI

Mom?

Silence.

Misaki looks around the room and notices Satomi's empty sleeping bag.

MISAKI (CONT'D)

Dad?

Misaki turns to look at his father's and comes face to face with the Kodama.

Misaki YELPS back in shock. The Kodama follows her movements calmly.

Lightning CRACKS in the distance, allowing Misaki to see the Kodama's features. They're intricately carved and beautiful. But she also looks deeply sad, like a wounded animal.

KODAMA

(in Japanese, song like)

Please, Country Dweller...won't you
also care? That little bird sings
oh so sweetly yet struggles through
your smoke filled room.

Misaki breathes HEAVILY. The sap is about to reach her when something clicks.

Lightning CRACKS closer to the house. The light from the lightning illuminates the room for a split second and the Kodama's shadow reflects on the walls in the shape of the tree.

Misaki's eyes grow wide with realization. She turns back to the Kodama.

MISAKI

(song like)

She flies north in Spring, where
it's cooler. She builds her nest
there, and lays her eggs. They will
soon be her babies and she will
sing to them while they rest.

The Kodama closes her eyes, in relief.

KODAMA

(in Japanese)

The little bird will continue
singing...

A path cuts through the sap from Misaki's sleeping back to the door.

Misaki, overwhelmed by emotion, breaks down.

MISAKI

Where are my parents?

The Kodama remains silent. Lightning CRASHES behind the house. The impact shatters the windows behind Misaki.

Misaki throws herself on the floor and covers her ears.

KODAMA

(in Japanese)

They won't sing anymore.

The Kodama uses the impact to hurl Misaki out of the house.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

In slow motion, Misaki rolls down the small driveway. When she finally stops, she looks back into the house and sees the Kodama in the front door.

The Kodama's eyes pierce into Misaki's soul, warning. She swings the door close. Misaki's heart THUDS loudly with her ragged BREATHS.

Misaki manages to sit up as lighting falls from the sky above the house and EXPLODES. The house catches fire instantly and a gut wrenching SHRIEK blares from the house and up the sky.

Misaki watches in shock as police SIRENS blare in the distance.

The house continues to burn as RAIN begins to fall from the sky.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.