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ECHOES IN THE DARK FIRST ROUGH DRAFT OF CHAPTER 1 – WITH CAT INSTEAD OF BIRD

On the empty stage Jikata recalled the waves of applause, the only moment when she felt fulfilled.

Everyone thought Jikata had left the Pepsi Center after her concert. Her smash concert, the last concert of a smash tour. All her concerts were sold out, all raves now. The wild shrieking and applause fed her ego.

But nothing else. Her life was as empty as the huge event center. As her great-grandmother would have said, her soul was not receiving nourishment and was withering.

Fans adored her. No one loved her. No man, no good friend male or female, no child. Her career was skyrocketing. Her life was tanking. She'd come to the pinnacle of success for a rock singer, a female half-Japanese no less, and found herself alone and panting after the climb.

She'd been thinking about her great-grandmother on her mother's side more and more often lately, and the old, straightlaced Japanese woman who so disapproved of her had been dead for five years. She'd died just as Jikata had tipped over into the first wild rush of fame. Though "straightlaced" was an English word and not much about her great-grandmother had been American.

Jikata had taken a chance tonight. Despite her manager's advice, she'd slipped in one of her own compositions, a ballad, into the concert.

It had bombed as usual.

No one appreciated her music. But composing it fed her soul.

Only one of her tunes had made it big, and it was hitting the top of the charts now. That really strange concoction of bells and chimes and an occasional gong tone. She'd sung – chanted – a mishmash of words in English and Japanese and French and had layered her voice in the track again and again over three octaves. She barely had a full three octave range and had worked hard on that track until each note was strong and perfect.

"Come to me" was going gold.

The tune wasn't really her composition and that's what bugged her. She'd heard odd patterns of notes, of chimes, of chants, the occasional gong beat in her head over the last two years. It had started here in Denver, her home town, a year ago February. A very dreary February.

As dreary and gray as her present life. She tried to shake off the blues, but a low-level depression gnawed at her.

"Rrrrrrowwww!" It was a demanding howl.

Jikata winced. Ensou was unhappy. When the Siamese was unhappy, everyone knew about it. The Pepsi Center had better acoustics than she'd thought, she could hear the cat easily.

And the gong and chime and chants in her head continuously now. She shivered.

"Rrrrrrowwww!"

"Over here, Ensou. How did you get out of the dressing room?" Why hadn't her assistant taken Ensou to the hotel after the concert? The cat loved concert nights, seemed to feel the energy of fans and Jikata and sound amps, so Jikata brought her

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There was a jingle.

"What's that?"

Ensou was playing with something, batting it, jumping on it, sending it flying with her paw and pouncing again. Each time there were jingles. A chiming ball.

She stood on the stage and felt the huge space around her then she walked off the stage and into the dark and a wind caught her.