Front matter

This prelude sets the scene and establishes the mood of this book, in the same way as the previous (and future) books are laid out. This time, the prelude is somewhat narrower in scope; it does not set the tone of the story as a whole, since the first book already exists. In an effective sense, you might think of it like this prelude actually has a third, unstated excerpt consisting of the first book, which passes the existing tone forward. Implications of this model, as well as of the quotations used, are left as an exercise for the reader; as usual, I write to provide questions, not answers.

The title of this book has a complex set of meanings and implications. This is by design, and was also the case for the previous book, though *Seed and Trellis* may have seemed more obvious in the connection between the ideas. With *Pawn and Storm*, it is perhaps clearer that this title scheme, as with numerous other elements of this story's essential structural layout, is heavily laced with complex symbolism that may not be immediately apparent.

Chapter One

Random fun fact: This show is very closely based on the play *Who Killed Santa?* by Neil Haven, complete with one of the possible endings being that the cast just gives up on the play because the script wasn't finished.

Also, this is something that was foreshadowed in Maddie's initial introduction. Kyoko mentions that Maddie wears a lot of jewelry with gems that look almost exactly like rubies, and that she makes it all herself. But as was also noted in her introduction, Maddie is a very intense, serious person. You might have asked yourself why she would be engaging in an activity that seems even more frivolous than playing Magic: the Gathering at tournaments. It also requires more time to make jewelry. What stones look almost exactly like rubies and are all slightly magical to Kyoko's senses? Not natural ones, that's for sure.

Chapter Two

The bronze sword being described is called a kopis and is a traditional form of ancient Greek sword. It's curved forward and shaped somewhat like a larger version of a kukri. It's more sharply curved than Thorn and has a convex tip, for a number of reasons; this makes it less suitable for thrusting. Thorn is more similar in profile to some of the thinner forms of the Illyrian sica, which has a longer, thinner, and less sharply curved blade. Unlike a normal sica (or a kopis, or a khopesh, or a falcata, or a kukri, or...you get the point), Thorn is sharpened on both edges. There are a number of reasons for this, mostly related to how much more you can get away with as a swordsmith when the material you're working with will be made supernaturally durable. Mundane blacksmiths have to manage an inherent property of steel, which is that harder (i.e., able to take and retain a sharper edge) alloys will also be less tough (i.e., they will be brittle and prone to shatter).

So swordsmiths will generally use a variety of methods to compensate for this issue. With a sword like a sica which has one side distinctly more favored than the other, a common solution is

to leave the other edge unsharpened. This lets you use a thicker spine and often use a tougher, softer alloy in that portion of the blade, while keeping the edge hard (and therefore sharp). This also lends the blade more weight (and thus momentum) and focuses that weight more towards the tip, which is why a kukri or kopis can cut in ways more associated with an axe than a knife. Fullers (grooves) and ridges in the center of a blade are also used to help strengthen the blade without adding as much weight.

None of this is relevant to Thorn. It is supernaturally tough and sharp, without much concern needed for the blade's shape and composition in the process. This means that the blade can be thinner without becoming fragile, that the material can be hard enough to take an edge without losing toughness, and that momentum doesn't matter much (since even a light swing will be sufficient most of the time, and Kyoko is unnaturally strong in any case, which further reduces the importance of weighting). This is also why Thorn can have such extensive silver and amber inlay; those materials don't represent a structural weakness when none of this is happening in a natural way. As a result, while it has the forward-swept shape of a sica, it is very much sharpened on both edges. In theory this means it could also be used with the outer side of the curve as the focus, similar to a sabre; however, the way the hilt is shaped would make this an awkward grip from an ergonomic standpoint. The point also has a distinct enough hawkbill profile that it would be rather awkward to thrust with it in that position. So Kyoko will pretty much always be using it more like a sica, focusing on the inner edge of the curved blade.

I don't know that this will be interesting to literally anyone, but if you were curious about it, here you go.

The sacrifice throw Kyoko performs here is directly drawn from judo, where it is referred to as uki-waza, lit. “floating technique”. In this throw the essential goal is to fall backwards and to the side, using your body weight and footwork to pull the attacker’s weight forward over their leading foot. Because you are falling in a more controlled way and the attacker is moving in a considerably larger arc, you will end up in a considerably better position, despite both having fallen down. As it is usually executed, you would maintain a grip on the attacker, both to soften the fall and prevent injury and to allow you to proceed into a grapple with an advantageous position. However, if you do not hold on and there is significant momentum involved, sacrifice throws such as this one can throw people a remarkable distance.

Also, “fixer” in U.S. slang will generally refer to someone who knows how to make evidence of crime go away. This doesn't always mean disposing of bodies, but it's a common enough use case that Derek is aware of what she's asking for here.

Chapter Three

In some ways, I think this represents a significantly darker tone than this story has taken up to this point. Sure, there's been violence up to this point, there have been bad things happening to people, and there have been allusions to even worse things. But Pepper's situation, I think, brings that feeling closer to home. It's a relatively small portion of people who can personally relate to things like witnessing violent death, kidnapping, or the emotional aftermath of killing someone. The

things going wrong in Pepper's life are much more mundane; abusive parents, being trapped in a bad home by the realities of how society is structured, the day-to-day misery of work as a wage slave who has to interact with the public constantly, these are different. These things feel more real, and I'm guessing a lot more people can relate to them, can directly and personally understand why she's so unhappy. Nor are they nearly as amenable to solution. In that way, this chapter is a marked turn towards a darker view of the world.

Chapter Four

The phrase *Si vis pacem, para bellum* is a famous Latin adage, which can be traced at least as far back as Vegetius's *De re militari* written by about 400CE. It translates as "If you desire peace, prepare for war", and is generally understood as a philosophical observation about peace and vulnerability. This adage was used as the motto of the German arms manufacturer Deutsche Waffen- und Munitionsfabriken, and was applied to several of their designs. One in particular, the 9x19mm Parabellum rimless cartridge, is the most prevalent calibre of handgun round in the world.

I use the transliteration Odin here. This pains me somewhat. Óðinn is not much like Odin in terms of pronunciation. In particular, the character ð is pronounced as the soft "th" in "father" or "this". My preference, if I were to use the name, would be to either write it out as Óðinn or trim it to Othin or Odhin. An English d is not at all the same. Unfortunately, for reasons unknown to me Odin is overwhelmingly the transliteration in common use. So while Kyoko probably does know this, in casual conversation she would be using Odin. Elsewhere in the story I may use other forms.

An observation because this hasn't yet come up: There are very few explicit descriptions of a character's gender or sexual orientation in the narration. This is intentional on my part for a few reasons. On a Watsonian level within the story, the narration is all from Kyoko's perspective. She's not a person who feels the need to make a big deal about it. She's pansexual; Lacuna is nonbinary; Saori is mostly gay. Kyoko doesn't generally consciously think about these things, though, so they're usually left implicit. On a more Doylian or metatextual level, this is what I tend to see as the end goal of societal inclusion. It's not about making a point of calling attention to traits or making sure that a quota is met. It's much more about my existence being normalized such that it isn't noteworthy, that it's just a thing which is true about me and which is mentioned when it's relevant. I try to reflect that here. Kyoko's sexual orientation hasn't been relevant to anything so far in the story, so it hasn't been mentioned. I don't call attention to Lacuna's pronoun choice because I don't feel it should need to be emphasized that they aren't using gendered ones.

On another note, I believe this is the first point where it has been clearly mentioned in the narration that lycanthropy is contagious. This is significant, in part because neither contagion nor a vulnerability to silver shows up in folklore until far more recently than people often think. The older myths (where they had werewolves as a clearly distinct creature at all; it wasn't all that clear a lot of the time in older folklore) rarely included either. The reasons for this mismatch will be discussed later on; for now I just wanted to confirm that it is intentional on my part.

Chapter Five

There's a name dropped here which hasn't been previously, the Labyrinth. I think that the basic idea can be inferred from context, but to clarify, this actually has been alluded to before. Kyoko knows four local hangouts for the supernatural crowd, she mentions this in the narration of book one. So far, she's mentioned three, Mark's, Softened Dreams, and the Blackbird Cabaret. The fourth is the Labyrinth, and she hasn't mentioned it so far for the same reasons she doesn't go there; she feels it's a creepy place and she tries not to think too hard about it. This is, incidentally, the same reason Toby doesn't go to Softened Dreams; Lacuna is too spooky for him. He mostly bases his social and professional life out of Mark's, and while Kyoko doesn't go there for fun much if at all, she can tolerate it. The Labyrinth, less so. The details of why will be discussed later.

These four were selected, incidentally, for a specific reason: They all cater to different social needs. A bar is great for some things, but it doesn't allow for the same kind of quiet, more sophisticated atmosphere as an art gallery and coffeehouse. The Blackbird is more of an event space, more purposeful, and not a great venue for doing business, so while they both go there, it doesn't work well for this meeting. The Labyrinth is a nightclub.

Chapter Seven

The name Ekaterina in Greek would be rendered Αικατερίνη, and in this case derived from the word καθαρός, "pure", pronounced "katharos". Coronis is another Greek name, Κορωνίς, meaning "raven, crow, corvid".

Chapter Eight

The throw referenced here as a floating hip throw is directly drawn from judo, being a direct translation of uki-goshi. This throw is noted for being more technically difficult than most hip throws, requiring more precision, but also being particularly effective against people stronger than oneself. You can easily find video examples if you're curious, it's a prominent and well-known throw.

Chapter Ten

I am not going to fully translate the conversation in Japanese here. I've attempted to follow the general pattern and structure of the original language–the question "are you well", for example, is a direct translation of a standard conversational exchange. But I am not skilled enough with the language to fully translate the conversation, and some elements do not easily translate directly. Where Kyoko uses "sir", for example, isn't quite what's actually being said, but it's the best approximation I have for the generally respectful and honorific-heavy tone she's taking.

A few specific notes, though. As Kyoko mentions in the narration, using personal names in this context would be culturally seen as quite improper. So, she and Saito are both using primarily family names in this conversation (keeping in mind that Saito uses the traditional surname-first

pattern, so that's his family name, not his personal name). She refers to him as Saito-san, which in this case would be translated as Mr. Saito; he is also using the -san suffix, and it would be translated here as Miss Sugiyama, but the tone just doesn't fit for that in English.

Note that Kyoko uses her full name here, and unusually for her, she uses the traditional format. This is intentional on my part, and largely based on the cultural background. Putting the personal name first would be confusing, Japanese just does not work that way. She only uses the personal name at all because Sugiyama is a relatively common surname. In 2008, it was estimated to be the 75th most common Japanese family name, with about 220,000 people using it. That's not a ton, but it's enough that after being away for almost twenty years, it would not be reliably clear who she's referring to. Because there's only one relevant Saito on the other end she doesn't use his personal name at all. Culturally, it would be very strange for people in their relative positions to be that personal. Knowing someone intimately enough to be on a first-name basis means something very different in Japan than in the U.S., for example.

The other note I do have is that he's actually being unusually polite or formal here. This is not something I can translate effectively, but it's distinctive in Japanese. He's not taking on an impersonal tone, hence why I did not include the "Miss" in translating Sugiyama-san; that title resonates differently in English than is apt here. But he is, on the whole, using respectful language. Japanese marks formality and politeness extensively using things like suffixes and verb conjugations, and he is using them a fair amount. Considering that he is socially very clearly her superior, this is not something that would necessarily be expected to this degree.

Chapter Eleven

The music Saori is playing here is based on a real song, "Carnival" by Raven Black.

For the curious, the classes Kyoko mentions drawing on here would primarily be: Mathematical Foundations for Computer Science; Probability and Statistical Inference; Probability and Computing; Algorithms and Advanced Data Structures; Introduction to Machine Learning; and Introduction to Cryptography. The topic would also have come up, though not necessarily framed in quite the same ways, in Genomes, Evolution, and Disease; Computational Genomics; Collective Intelligence; and Algorithms in Nature. And then a third set of perspectives that touch on this will have been found in Mind and Body: The Objective and the Subjective; Introductory Psychology; Research Methods in Cognitive Psychology; Cognitive Neuroscience Research Methods; Cognitive Psychology; How the Brain Makes Meaning; and Psychopathology.

I do, in fact, have her whole transcript written out. This is actually why she's in Pittsburgh to begin with. Carnegie Mellon has one of the very few undergraduate degree programs for computational biology, and was among the first schools to treat it as a specific focus at any level. Kyoko started out focusing on that, that's the degree path she was initially signing up for; she added the second major in cognitive neuroscience a little bit later. I cheated a bit by using current degree requirements rather than those that were in place when she was in school, but the overall topics are going to be much the same in either case.

Chapter Thirteen

The phrase Kyoko uses here, “go bite your tail”, is one that’s more significant than it might seem. For such a simple phrase there’s a lot to unpack. Because usually, she would have said “go fuck yourself” here, that’s more her typical pattern. This has the same general tone, but it lacks both the sexual allusion and the hostile tone. This is something Kyoko put a fair bit of thought into, because she does want to treat Raincloud well. By using this more measured substitute, she’s actively trying to be kind and foster a healthy relationship, so she’s not being hostile, but also not just ignoring this comment. That would make Raincloud both feel like she can get away with shit, and feel like she’s being ignored. Using the more personalized form also means that even when Kyoko’s telling Raincloud off, she’s simultaneously reminding her that she cares, that she did consider this and uses a phrase specifically for her. That implicit meaning is intentional on both my part and hers.

Chapter Fourteen

Kadir is a masculine Arabic given name. It is a transliteration of “قدي” and reasonably common as a name. It roughly means powerful or competent, and is a shortening of one of the names of God, al-Kadir, lit. “the (most) powerful/competent/skilled”, as a rough translation. It can be transliterated numerous ways, and has multiple variants and regional variations within the source language as well. I have used Kadir here because it is relatively straightforward, and uses the same transliteration pattern as for example the Japanese words I use, i.e., Latin vowels. Thus, it is sometimes written as “Kadeer”, which to an English speaker might more easily register as the sound being represented. However, if following that transliteration, it would potentially create confusion as that would be pronounced quite differently in the Latin-derived pattern (which is also, incidentally, more common across languages using the Latin alphabet to my knowledge; English vowels are the odd one out). As English has no special claim on the Latin alphabet, and to maintain consistency with the Hepburn transliteration system used with Japanese, Kadir is what I opted for.

Chapter Fifteen

Clownshoes is a slightly unusual construction. It’s derived from the idiom “clown shoe” as used to describe someone who is inept or clownish; it’s hard to say how old that is, given the nature of idiomatic language, but it dates back to at least the early 2000s. Clownshoes, used as an adjective to describe someone with the same property, is a bit less common, but it’s not a completely novel construction. Given that the meaning is also fairly easy to infer, it seemed like an apt choice here.

The description of how foxes smell is accurate; it is hard to distinguish, initially, from skunk. They also don’t sound much like people imagine, but the scent in particular tends to surprise people. Personally I like it, but, well. There’s a reason that I’m writing a character with a lot of sensory oddities. I also enjoy the smell of skunks, burning hair, and on rare occasions sewage, but physically cannot tolerate the smell of mustard or grapefruit enough to eat either, to give you an idea of just how far I am from human standard here.

The discussion of tattoos is, in broad strokes, accurate. It is of necessity very abbreviated, and if you're interested I recommend looking into the topic, because it's fascinating. The origins of tattooing and how its role in Japanese society first developed are hard to piece together, and well beyond the scope of this note. What can be said confidently is that during the Edo period, tattoos started to be used to mark criminals. At the beginning of the Meiji period, around the late 1800s, they were fully outlawed, and remained criminal until legalized by the occupying forces in 1948. It remained strongly linked to criminal behavior in culture, though, and while that's softened somewhat over the years it remains a complicated and controversial topic.

Horishi, transliterated with the standard vowel pattern, is usually translated as tattooist or tattoo artist. This is not a literal translation. Written as 彫師, it more literally translates as "master carver", in a respectful tone. Irezumi can be written several ways, with maybe the most common being 入れ墨, and is pronounced with four syllables. It is literally translated as something like "insertion of ink", and can be used to refer to tattoos more generally. Because I do want to keep the two types of tattoo distinct, though, in this narrative these terms without translation will refer to the traditional Japanese form, with other use cases translated to tattoo.

Chapter Sixteen

Salaryman is a word that doesn't translate well into English and is often left as-is. The Japanese form is just a phonetic rendering of that English combination, in any case; it's in application that it varies. A salaryman is a salaried worker, more commonly male, but not exclusively so, particularly in more recent times. A salaryman is employed as a salaried employee of a corporation, and is expected to be wholly devoted to their professional life. The cultural idea will generally include someone being hired immediately after college and spending their entire career with one company. Social events are with coworkers rather than other friends, and the expectation is that the employee will work very long hours. It is closely tied to karōshi, lit. "death by overwork". 110 hour weeks, 34-hour continuous shifts, and going weeks on end without a day off are all associated. Kyoko is essentially saying that her father is in this societal role of a salaryman, which implies that he had very little time for his family and was deeply embedded in corporate culture. As usual, this is a very abbreviated treatment, as full detail is beyond the scope of this note.

As an aside, it's not actually that common for lunar new year to be a major thing in Japan. New year celebrations have largely moved to 1 January, and there's less focus on the traditional lunar calendar than in most East Asian countries. I mention this mostly to confirm that I am aware of this trend, and having Kyoko's family still consider it a major thing is not an oversight on my part.

The description Pepper provides of her issues is, broadly speaking, accurate. Prenatal and perinatal exposure to drugs and toxins causes a wide variety of developmental problems, and those problems can be severe. Nicotine is specifically associated with tic disorders like Tourette's syndrome, which is essentially what she's describing; she is prone to sudden, involuntary muscle movements, twitching, and dyskinesia (essentially a catchall term for movement disorders, particularly those related to involuntary movements and poorly coordinated motor activity).

The note about antipsychotic treatment is also essentially accurate. Antipsychotics, particularly harsher typical antipsychotics, are associated with serious side effects. Tardive dyskinesia, specifically, is generally defined by involuntary, repetitive movements and lack of coordination, with movements being jerky or clumsy. It is not always permanent, but it can be, and treatment is pretty limited.

Benzatropine is one of the more common treatment options particularly in the U.S., and is essentially a Parkinson's medication which works by adjusting the relative levels of cholinergic and dopaminergic activity in certain areas of the brain; it's not currently considered a very effective treatment, but has been used for that purpose. The details are beyond the scope of this note, but if you are interested information about the pharmacology is readily available online. I mention this mostly to confirm that I am aware benzatropine is not very well-supported, and this is not an oversight on my part.

As I have noted in a number of places, I use my own life and experiences as inspiration in this story often. This is the case with Pepper's movement issues. I have a mild-to-moderate case of chronic tardive dyskinesia, primarily caused by prolonged maintenance use of antipsychotic drugs (risperidone was the main one, if you're curious, along with aripiprazole and briefer intervals of lurasidone, clozapine, olanzapine, and quetiapine), along with a shorter period of high intensity treatment with haloperidol. I also have other movement issues and a tendency towards convulsion. Context is complicated and not currently relevant, but I do use personal experience in these descriptions.

Fun fact, though: I don't have to do much to generate Pepper's typing pattern. The typos are organic. All I really do is type a little too fast without paying enough attention, then go back and edit the output slightly to make it *less* incoherent. I'm particularly prone to inserting semicolons, random spaces, and hitting keys that aren't even close to the letters I'm actually trying to type. I think the result, even after I reduce the noise so that it's hopefully at least legible, is an appropriately unusual pattern of typographical errors.

Chapter Seventeen

The description of Westinghouse Park is accurate. Westinghouse's mansion really was called Solitude. The park is located about five blocks from Resolve Crisis Services, which is Pittsburgh's primary mental health crisis center.

The busway being referred to here is named the Martin Luther King Jr. East Busway. The basic concept is that a single highway, one lane in each direction, runs from downtown Pittsburgh nine miles east through the city to the suburbs. This highway is reserved for use by bus lines, with no privately owned vehicles allowed. It serves as the main trunk of the Pittsburgh bus system, and stations on the busway could in some ways be considered local hubs from which other lines branch.

"Hillfolk" is an unusual construction referring to people who live in rural areas throughout the Appalachian region. A friend of mine who used to live in that culture and region feels that it is a better appelation than hillbilly in several ways, and I tend to agree. It's unusual but between

better sound, less derogatory tone, and the preference of someone who has personal history, it's what I use.

A P90 is a specific variety of light submachine gun. The full name is FN P90, manufactured by FN Herstal in Belgium. It is known for being lightweight, fully ambidextrous, and technologically advanced; it is also illegal for almost all civilians to own, being fully automatic with a max rate of fire around 1000 rounds/minute.

The narration says that the running long jump is grouped with athletics rather than gymnastics. This is accurate. The long jump is classed in the Athletics heading and its managing organization in that context is World Athletics. Gymnastics is a separate program. Due to some quirks of language, Athletics being the term for this category may seem odd to American readers, but it is accurate.

Chapter Eighteen

The poker hand being cited is an infamous one, consisting of a pair of aces and a pair of eights, each in both black suits, with an unspecified fifth card. It's referred to as a dead man's hand largely because of apocryphal descriptions of it being the hand Wild Bill Hickok was holding when he was killed. This is not well-substantiated, but it has cultural traction and has become one of the main specific, named hands in poker.

Chapter Nineteen

The phrase "you can't step in the same river twice" is an allusion to the Greek poet Heraclitus. Though his work survives only in the form of a few fragments, he is cited extensively by other classical sources. This idea of it being impossible to step in the same river twice is one that is consistently attributed towards him, as part of Heraclitus's general attitude that change and strife are inherent in the universe, and that many things can be understood as a dialectic or juxtaposition of opposites. A common (though far from the only) interpretation of this phrase is that because the water is constantly moving, you can't really step in the same river a second time; the water you touched is already gone. By extension, because people and attitudes are also constantly changing, you can't have the same experience twice, not quite. Just because you go back to the same building doesn't mean you're in the same place.

The passage mentioned here is drawn from the novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. LeGuin, 1969, and is a direct quotation.

Chapter Twenty

The music mentioned here is inspired by real music. "Walking on Sunshine" is a collaboration between Ice Nine Kills and Reel Big Fish, focusing on the film *American Psycho* as inspiration. It hadn't actually been released yet at the time when this book is set, but it's just too fantastic as a juxtaposition not to include. The Vocaloid song, meanwhile, might be any of a wide range; the

specific one I was listening to at the time was “The Spider and the Kitsune-Like Lion" [鬼蜘蛛ト狐ノ獅子ト] by Masa Works Design, but there are plenty of options.

Dacnomania is a real word.

When Kyoko talks about taking falls here, she’s referring to some specific skills. Learning to fall down or be thrown without being injured in the process is a major skill in a variety of martial arts; judo and aikido are the two where she learned it, in large part because I have the most experience with them. Though given that both are Japanese in origin, and she was studying in Tokyo at the direction of her rather traditionalist father, it also just makes sense. There are numerous differences between judo and aikido, but for the purpose of this note I’m going to be treating them as a unit, since falling is mostly the same set of skills in both; this skillset is referred to as ukemi. The details are outside the scope of this note and discussed elsewhere, but the summary is that there’s a skill to taking falls without injury, it’s trainable, and Kyoko doing it poorly here is causing her falls to be harder and causing her to lose forward momentum. The double-footed side fall at the bottom, meanwhile, involves both feet coming off the ground and the body falling from that position, and is one of the nastiest falls to take. Visual examples of technically correct rolls can be found in video examples, as can a discussion of the mechanics; the term for a correct forward roll is a toshi forward rolling breakfall, while the less proper form is a guruma forward rolling breakfall.

Chapter Twenty-One

The music casually alluded to here is real; dubstep mariachi exists and is surprisingly good. The song I was specifically listening to while writing this was a dubstep remix of El Mariachi Loco.

Vellum is not paper, but rather a type of parchment. People often use the word parchment interchangeably with paper, but strictly speaking they’re quite different; parchment refers to a piece of leather or animal hide used in a similar way to paper. Vellum specifically is made from a lamb, calf, or baby goat, and was historically seen as a very high-quality, expensive writing material.

Nephele is a Greek name; written Νεφελη, it means “Cloud”. In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses (3. 155 ff)* she is one of the Nymphai Artemisiai, a group of nymphs who are personal attendants of Artemis.

A .50 BMG round, short for Browning machine gun, is among the heaviest calibre rounds used in human-portable weapons. It’s not all that common even in that context, having been intended more for vehicle-mounted, belt-fed machine guns. But there are human-portable guns which use it, mostly antimateriel sniper rifles intended to be used against armored vehicles more than against personnel.

Fairywood is a real neighborhood and is largely as described. The specific phrase “where dreams go to die” is one I picked up from a local friend.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Kyoko says that she's being invited by a nymph while a nymph is hunting her. This is accurate, because both maenads and sky nymphs were considered to be nymphs. The term was not very clearly defined and incorporated a wide range of beings.. They have little in common in an immediate sense, but they are associated in this way.

Chapter Twenty-Three

A brief note here because it hasn't been outright stated in the narrative, though I think there are enough hints to work it out if you think about it: There's a reason Kyoko has the specific rules she does for interacting with Melissa. I think a lot of it is pretty apparent. Sudden movements and sudden loud noises tend to not be great for people with PTSD in general. Her issues with physical contact are, similarly, pretty straightforward. I am unlikely to ever go into great detail about what all was done to her because it would frankly just be grotesquerie without narrative purpose, but it did have sexual elements, and when combined with the emotions being forced onto her, that gets pretty ugly. Skin contact tends to immediately throw her into flashbacks as a result. All of these are fairly common triggers to avoid.

But there's another, more specific rule Kyoko follows. She does not engage in dramatic emotional displays. She tries to keep her tone, facial expressions, and other cues of emotional response subdued. There's a specific reason for this, related to Melissa's alexithymia. As has been noted, Melissa generally only recognizes her own emotions when they're pushed to extremes. She feels them when they're milder, but they don't register clearly to her conscious awareness.

However, she does still have decent ability to read emotional cues in other people. And her comparison point is in her own experience, so if someone else looks happy, they seem ecstatic because that's what "happy" feels like to her; other emotions are similar. In effect, every emotional cue around her is being amplified because her understanding of emotion in general has been so badly disrupted. She knows this is the case, and to a degree she can correct for it, but her instinctive understanding tends to exaggerate emotional cues heavily. Kyoko keeps hers subdued because if the expression is that of a milder emotion than she actually feels, Melissa's distorted perception will be providing an accurate read of it rather than perceiving an extreme emotion.

Incidentally, this is also why Melissa's own emotional expression is so limited, why she seems cheerful all the time whether she feels that way or not. It's not exactly that she's expressing cheerfulness. It has more in common with the blunted or constricted affect common in, for example, autistic people. She has a baseline emotional presentation, and variance from that baseline is limited; she does not seem to care as much as she does. But what she has learned is that if she sets that baseline to what she thinks of as "neutral", it registers to people as unhappy or upset. So, she made a conscious effort to pull that baseline up into the range of happiness or a carefree attitude, and then centered her variance on that. This still registers as creepy sometimes, but she finds it preferable to how people react if she presents with what she would personally think of as "calm and content".

Chapter Twenty-Four

The description of Oakland is broadly accurate. It is a neighborhood defined by academia (technically defined as several neighborhoods but they can be lumped together for this purpose). Strictly speaking, Carnegie Mellon is primarily located in Squirrel Hill, but as it's directly across the street from Oakland and has so much overlap with Oakland culturally, people tend to group it into that neighborhood. The University of Pittsburgh features a forty-two story cathedral built in a Gothic Revivalist style—both one of the tallest cathedrals and tallest educational buildings in the world. Named the Cathedral of Learning, it is a very visible landmark which can be seen from anywhere in the neighborhood.

The University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, similarly, is a real thing, though the exact details are complex. UPMC itself is a nonprofit medical organization affiliated with the University of Pittsburgh, acting as a teaching hospital. UPMC Presbyterian, which is sort of the center of their organization, is in Oakland near the university campus; it is affiliated with the school (though a distinct legal entity, and UPMC's insurance division is distinct from either one) and is a major hospital. Kyoko's opinion of them is informed by her own attitudes and biases, and is not intended to depict a necessarily accurate view, even beyond my standard disclaimer that the real-world material I include is always being used fictitiously.

Lachrymatory agent is a somewhat technical term for a chemical weapon which works by causing irritation of the skin and eyes; the common name is tear gas. Strictly speaking they are generally not gases, but the difference between a gas and an aerosol is not important for a lot of applications. Pepper spray is also a lachrymatory agent, but it's less toxic and targets a different receptor than others. The one Kyoko is commenting on owning here is 2-chlorobenzalmalononitrile, commonly called CS gas; it is more commonly used by police and military forces than civilians, and is the compound most commonly referred to as tear gas in practical application.

As an incidental comment, there's a reason she prefers to use these rather than other less-lethal weapons. As was shown in *Seed and Trellis*, Kyoko doesn't do well with flashbangs; because they work by triggering sensory overload, she's exceptionally susceptible to their effects. Pepper spray and similar agents, though, aren't directly acting by sensory overload. They're essentially stimulating the same sort of response as, in the case of pepper spray, raw chilis; CS gas is similar but more closely resembles the effects of horseradish in terms of what receptor it targets. Because they're acting more as a toxin than a direct sensation, she's instead quite resistant to them, for the same reasons as she is to other toxins. She used the flashbang instead in the first book largely for situational reasons. Aerosols take time to spread and to affect people, particularly in open spaces. They're also going to be less reliable in her use cases. Anyone who is resistant to poisons (werewolves come to mind), anyone who has a markedly inhuman physiology, and anyone who is taking measures to defend against chemical weapons will probably shrug tear gas off pretty readily. Because flashbangs are acting by directly providing visual and auditory information, anyone who is using those senses will be at least somewhat susceptible, and while someone like a werewolf will recover relatively quickly, they will still be impaired at least momentarily. So while she would rather use something chemical given the choice, she has both these types of nonlethal crowd

control on hand. In this case, lachrymatory agents are more viable.

Chapter Twenty-Five

The first song here is based on a real song, "Demon Kitty Rag" by Katzenjammer.

Deadman's switch, which I write that way rather than as dead-man's switch for largely stylistic reasons, is a generalized concept from engineering. The basic principle is that an event is triggered by something *not* being done, such that it triggers if there isn't ongoing, active intervention. The traditional example which gave rise to this name is in transport devices like trains, where if the operator stops holding a switch down, the engine immediately loses power. It's a fail-safe system meant to prevent a crash if the operator is abruptly incapacitated or dies without having time to deactivate the machine. Without ongoing action it will stop rather than continue to operate without control and cause an accident. The same basic concept can be extended into numerous other fields and contexts.

In this case, as the term is also used sometimes, Kyoko is instead talking about a fail-deadly system. In this usage, ongoing activity is required to *prevent* an action from taking place. You see this kind of system in all kinds of places, from nuclear weapon protocols in which radio silence triggers a launch to setting up a safety call with a friend such that if you don't check in by a certain time they're to assume that you have been incapacitated in one way or another and respond appropriately. The shared element is that you do not have to take a positive action to make something happen, and if you're incapacitated or dead, it will still happen.

With this sort of fail-deadly system, there are innately going to be risks of the action being triggered by mistake. If you set up a safety call with a friend before going on a date with a stranger, and your phone dies, you might be having a very awkward conversation with the police in short order trying to explain that you have not in fact been kidnapped. In this case, Kyoko doesn't know what the details of this potential deadman's switch might be, which is kind of the point she's making to Raincloud—acting without first establishing what dangers Caleb might pose would be reckless. Sometimes acting decisively is better than being cautious, but in this case she thinks the balance is weighted towards a slower approach. This is, of course, possibly influenced by her own biases.

Harp dubstep is a real thing. The song I was listening to specifically Fl0w, which I believe is by Mr Smoke; the video I found isn't entirely clear, but I'm not finding anyone else to credit with it. The slogan on Saori's shirt is my own material, though.

Gin, also called gin rummy, is a variant of rummy for two players.

Chapter Twenty-Six

The note about Saori's name being a near-homophone with the word sorry is one that I've thought about a lot, though I think this is the first time it's been mentioned. It's not an exact match; the o is pronounced, so there's a different vowel structure than in sorry, and the r is pronounced

differently. It's representing a voiced alveolar flap, represented ⟨ɾ⟩ in the International Phonetic Alphabet. The English word sorry, on the other hand, uses a voiced retroflex approximant. To put this in terms that may be easier to understand, the Japanese phoneme is intermediate between an English "l" and "r" in sound. The cadence is also slightly different; in American English, the r in sorry is stressed, which usually in my experience means that the consonant is extended to a slightly longer time. There is no such stress in Saori's name. So on the whole, it's not an exact match, and the differences are notable enough that they can be readily distinguished. But they're close enough that an American English speaker who had no prior exposure to the sound and was not particularly familiar with Japanese phonology might well think she was saying her name was "Sorry". Unsurprisingly, she finds this hilarious.

The name "Dusk" was a hard one for me to settle on. The problem I run into that because of how languages are structured, a lot of the names or titles applied to Kali are not going to translate very readily. They might be phrased awkwardly, or might be much longer in English than would reasonably be used as a name. It's also challenging to find much information about a lot of them; they are not very well-attested in English documents, and I am nowhere near capable of linguistic analysis on Sanskrit or related languages. Many of the lists I can find, which are relatively sparse, have little clarity on the sources or the translation being used. Darkness, time, or death show up often, but given that she was intentionally downplaying the drama here, it wouldn't make sense for her to use a name like "great darkness".

So, Dusk is a sort of compromise. It evokes that sense of night and darkness, it still doesn't register quite as a normal name and Kyoko already observed that she never did say it actually was her name. But it's not so dramatic as to immediately suggest a particularly dangerous nature, either. The name is clearly enough linked with the same themes of darkness as to be suggestive, even if it's not exactly the same.

To make the comparison more obvious in hindsight, then, Dusk's appearance was fairly carefully selected. Kali is often described as wearing a tiger's skin. She is described as having dark, dusky, or blueish skin. She wears a garland of skulls in many depictions. Her eyes are traditionally red-rimmed and dark (hence red-framed sunglasses), and her mouth is often emphasized, with very red lips and tongue, and very white teeth. The pants are just because I think it's a visually striking combination. But the remainder of her appearance, the clothing and physical features both are pretty specifically selected as to evoke Kali's traditional iconography. When it is then displayed more overtly in this scene, the intention is that it makes that earlier, milder depiction feel at least a little bit obvious. This is intentional, on my part and also on Kali's in the story. That first presentation, including the highlighted passage mentioning gods, symbols, and metaphor, is meant to be not all that obvious at a first glance, but much more apparent in hindsight. It's meant to be a facepalm, how did I not see this earlier sort of moment. I think it works fairly well for that with this amount of overtly evocative description, even if the name wasn't quite a perfect comparison point.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Gwydion is a figure from Welsh folklore. It's tricky to fully parse out the older myths, because the main source for Welsh folklore and myth was written well after material stared to be euhemerized in response to Christianity becoming widespread. It also might represent a contemporary writer's fiction in places, rather than older material, because much of the material is from a single source, *Four Branches of the Mabinogi (Pedair Cainc Y Mabinogi).* What can be determined with confidence is that Gwydion was a major cultural figure. He plays a central role in the fourth branch, *Math fab Mathonwy,* which focuses on a complex tangle of relationships. Gwydion's brother Gilfaethwy becomes fixated on the virginal girl that his uncle Math kept as a footrest. If Math was not at war, he was supernaturally required to rest his feet on a virgin or he would die. Gwydion starts a war so that Math would leave, allowing his brother to rape the girl; afterwards, he went and resolved the war he had started with a duel in order to minimize further bloodshed. Gwydion then proceeds to alternately help and harm numerous people, including his sister, his nephew, and the woman he constructs out of flowers to be his nephew's bride.

All things considered, even if the Four Branches is considered as secondary fiction, it seems to draw strongly on older material, and Gwydion in particular is mentioned in older sources, where the depiction lines up with this more extensive story. Several of the characters seem to be strongly related to myths in neighboring cultures, and those myths are generally agreed to have been depicting deities. So while it has to be evaluated with the understanding that it may not be a faithful representation of the older material, this much of the story seems to be pretty strongly anchored. Gwydion is decidedly a trickster, a mercurial figure who both helps and harms almost every character in this branch.

Cormac is an old Irish masculine name of uncertain derivation.

Ravindra, written ರವೀಂದ್ರ, is a Kannada masculine given name, related to similar names in other Indian languages. It is a compound of the element "ravi", which is drawn from the Sanskrit रवि meaning "sun", and Indra, a major god in Hinduism. The overall meaning is "lord of the sun". Kalivallabha, meanwhile, is a transliteration of the Kannada title ಕಲಾ ವಲ್ಲಭ, which very roughly translates as "masterfully skilled" and was a title applied to the Rashtrakuta emperor Dhruva. Both names are using elements common in multiple Indian languages; in this case, I am citing Kannada specifically for a reason.

Imagawayaki, written 今川焼き, is a Japanese dish made with batter wrapped around a filling and grilled, a bit like a waffle. Traditionally it's stuffed with red bean paste, but there are a ton of variations now, and it's a common Japanese street food.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

White phosphorous is an allotrope of phosphorous commonly used in incendiary devices in the real world. It's pretty terrifying; it burns hot, for a long time, and it's very hard to put the fire out. It will cling to surfaces, including skin. The smoke it produces is unusual, scrambling vision in a way that's described as being similar to privacy glass rather than ordinary smoke, and is in fact a mist which is both toxic and caustic. It burns on contact with air and is, all things considered, an absolutely horrifying weapon. Even without it also being cursed, Saori using those grenades on

people would be quite possibly considered a war crime. Using them in an urban setting, for example, is likely to cause harm to civilian structures, which is restricted (though not fully banned) by the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, and there have been discussions as to whether the toxic effects are sufficient to make WP an illicit chemical weapon as well.

I think this is the first time that Kyoko has alluded to being effectively immune to electricity. This probably isn't surprising given how much of it she puts out herself; if she were susceptible to electrocution she'd have probably managed to fry herself by now. But I think it's the first time she's mentioned it, and I thought I'd note that yes, she is essentially immune to any ordinary degree of electrical current. You'd basically need an actual lightning bolt, and even then it would be harming her by temperature of the surrounding air, not the direct effects of the electricity.

Chapter Thirty-One

I use the spelling lacklustre here rather than lackluster. This is largely because the word is derived from French, and lustre is spelled that way in the root language. Between that and it being Commonwealth standard I see no reason to use the American form.

Saccade is a word being used in a sense derived from neuroscience and related fields. It refers to a jerky movement of the eye. You actually have this happening all the time. When you read a page, it usually feels like there's a smooth progression, but in reality your eyes are doing a series of quick, jerky movements, and your brain is making them feel like they're fluid in post-processing. It shows up in a lot of other places, where the moment of movement is being elided by visual processing centers. It has a lot of overlap with change-blindness and other quirks of visual processing.

The poem being recited here is my own work. Given that it's supposed to represent an original creation in-universe, this seemed most fitting. It's not my best work, but it's passable, and I think in particular it works well when recited. The full text is:

The blossoms are still scarlet even when you close your eyes
And something in you knows
That when your mind says you can trust your sight
Every bit of it is lies
Does it matter that what you see is rotting
When melting flowers still smell sweet?

At the end of the day, walking home
You stop to smell the roses
And you can see the rag-and-bone man
Coming out to start *his* day
And does it matter that your eyes are saying
The sweet-scented night is empty
When in your bones you know

You saw a shadow at the end of the alley?
Only for a moment as you stopped
To smell the roses, mixed with the sweetness
Of yesterday's bread as it decomposes

Probably just your mind playing tricks on you
But at the end of the day, if your mind plays tricks
Are you sure you'd catch it in the act?
You ask your mind whether you can trust it
"Of course you can," says the mind, with total confidence
And like any confidence game
If you do it right, the mark will never know
What hit them
They just know they'll never be the same

And deep down you don't really want to know
Don't want to peek behind the curtain
Too scared of what it is that you might find
Out of sight and out of mind
But at the end of the night
The rag-and-bone man walks home too
But he walks away whistling, because

He saw something beautiful at the end of the alley
And much to his joy, and perhaps to your sorrow
While you won't have a thing to see
When you walk home tomorrow
And you'll never know what melting roses mean
The beauty will still be there for him
Just waiting to be seen

The blossoms are still scarlet even when you close your eyes.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Shadow's observation about being achromatic rather than monochrome is accurate. While it is often used to refer to black-and-white, monochrome more technically means that an image contains only shades of a single color. A fully black-and-white image is more accurately termed achromatic or greyscale. Because greyscale is usually only applied as a quality of an image being seen, I use achromatic here. This is to emphasize that both Shadow's vision and its external appearance are in this state of lacking any color whatsoever; its vision is greyscale and its outward appearance is strictly black and white, without even greys involved. Also, yes, Shadow is the kind

of person who corrects that misuse in casual conversation.

Shadow introduces a darker element to the story, pun intended and you'd best get used to bad jokes about it, because Shadow is also the kind of person who uses it as a pronoun purely to fuck with people. That gives you an idea of what its sense of humor is like. To return to topic, though: It attempted suicide, as a teenager and having already had a lot of fucked up experiences before that. Shadow isn't unique in this (Pepper, for example, has tried at least once), but this is the first time it has been mentioned. And it's a loaded topic, so I figured I'd comment on it specifically.

Kyoko is pretty casual about this. It's not a part of the story she focuses on. She also doesn't have a strong emotional reaction, and since that might show up again in this story I want to comment on it here. There are a few reasons for this. One is personal history; I can attest that after a couple stays in a psych ward you've heard quite a few variations of the basic story "I tried to kill myself". It doesn't feel shocking to her. Other reasons are cultural (Japan does have a lot of complex historic meaning around the topic) and empathetic (she knows very well what it feels like to suffer enough for death to feel like a better option than continuing). Ultimately, Kyoko is pretty much always focused more on the situation that *led* to a suicide attempt, because she feels that's where the actual pain was. This shows in the narration. I wanted to note this, because suicide is a complicated and loaded topic, and I don't intend this to element of the narrative to argue for or against it, only to depict an attitude held by a fictional character.

Chapter Thirty-Three

The music mentioned here is inspired by "Kill For You", by Zolita.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Capi is, unsurprisingly, Saori's nickname for Capinera. Note that because her name is Italian, the vowels do not resemble English; it sounds sort of like the English word "copy".

Capinera describes a flaw in the wards' targeting system. What she means is essentially that the wards are using fae magic, and part of what they're doing is finding targets for the triggered spells built into the ward's structure. So, she can take advantage of the fact that her own power is almost purely fae, blend into the existing magic of the ward, and pull a slight hole open in the force redirection effect without giving the targeting system enough sense of her as "external" to adequately trigger anything related to an individual. She's also got a keen enough sense for what the landmines are to pick an area where she'll avoid tripping any of the indiscriminate, area-targeted spells. This bypass is extremely elegant, and for Capinera to identify the magic, assess how to open a small, temporary hole in the primary structure, identify the targeting systems, and find a place where she can get inside safely like this is impressive. Doing it this quickly suggests far more skill than Kyoko realizes in the narration.

Chapter Thirty-Five

The narration here might be a little hard to follow. It's intentionally chaotic to reflect the situation and Kyoko's altered state of consciousness. There are a few details I want to draw attention to, though.

Kyoko describes the injuries she's causing in very precise terms. She doesn't cut the arteries in the first Sidhe's throat, or even cut the carotids; she cuts both common carotids, before they branch into the internal and external carotid branches. She doesn't break the second guy's leg; she dislocates the knee, which is often what people really mean when they talk about breaking a leg, rather than fracturing the bone. This is intentional on my part and reflects her anatomical education showing through even while in a chaotic fight and altered state of consciousness.

The note about the femoral artery bleeding heavily is accurate; it is possible for the artery to bleed out so much into the leg as to cause death by internal bleeding. In this case, death by external bleeding is almost immediate.

The techniques Kyoko uses in her grappling here are directly drawn from judo; she first does something I learned under the name shrimping, which involves planting her foot and then pushing and turning to ram into the Sidhe's knee with her whole hip and leg behind the movement. She then does a loosely adapted kesa-gatame escape to end up on top of her opponent in a side-four-quarter hold. This involves her body being perpendicular to her opponent's, and is in my opinion a relatively weak hold against someone who has training, but it leaves her head free to bite the hound, and the Sidhe she has pinned is badly injured and disoriented, so a weak hold is still plenty.

Chapter Thirty-Six

Spastic is used here in the sense "characteristic of or including a spasm", with spasm used in the medical sense "a sudden, involuntary contraction of a muscle". The construction spastically is nonstandard but is following standard English adverbial structure, and I think is easy to parse. This is similar to calling the movement convulsive, but as convulsion typically involves more systemic activity affecting multiple parts of the body, and as Kyoko is herself prone to convulsive seizures and would know this difference, spastic seems more apt in this case. I mention this largely because I am aware that the word is often used as a slur and is rather offensive in many contexts, and I want to clarify that in this case it is being used in that direct medical sense rather than as an insult or slur.

The narration at the end is possibly a little difficult to follow, and this is intentional. But there are a few notes I have about why, and what some of the terms are.

This is the first time Kyoko has specifically mentioned mania. She's mentioned that some of the diagnoses applied to her as a kid and teen were accurate, but not much about which, and this is one of them. Kyoko would be aptly diagnosed with type 1a bipolar disorder. She's mentioned having depressive spells, and she confidently does sometimes have manic-spectrum episodes. There hasn't been one on-screen and so it hasn't been mentioned. She doesn't take medication for this or other symptoms, largely because her resistance to drugs makes it so limited in effect as to be useless. (Different drugs are affected in different ways for her, incidentally, which is why mood

stabilizers are almost nonexistent in impact even though caffeine works very effectively.)

Mania is not exactly the same thing as the euphoria which Thorn induces; it is presently understood more as elevated lability, with every emotion being amplified. But this does mean that when she's happy while manic it can reach the same giddy state she's in, and the need to keep moving she describes is very characteristic. I base a number of things in this section directly on my own experience of hypomania, and one of the clearest feelings is a restless need for motion.

Flight of ideas is a mode of thought or of communication extremely characteristic of bipolar disorders. Her basic summary is accurate; ideas move so quickly that if someone is having a conversation, they seem to be jumping from one to another so fast and on such loose or random paths that their conversational partner can't even keep track of what the topic is on a moment-to-moment basis. My experience is that it feels like there's a single idea that is constructed out of all of them, a very large idea that draws in all of those loose connections into one model. The characteristic pressured speech, from the inside, feels like I'm frantically trying to convey a large volume of information building out of connections that seem, and may be, irrational, but which genuinely are building towards a single theme.

You might be able to find the thematic links in this one, or at least some of them. Others may not be as apparent. I can say with confidence that there *are* connections linking all of these thoughts into a single whole, and they may be more apparent as time goes on.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Cat sìth is pronounced much like cat sidhe, with a soft "she" sound as the second word; the th is not pronounced as it would be in English. It is taken directly from Scottish Gaelic; for a variety of reasons, while the name is attested in both the Scottish form and the Irish form cat sidhe, I use the spelling sìth here. In part, because Sidhe is being generally used to refer to specifically the humanoid Court members in this story, using cat sidhe would be needlessly complicated. Cat sìth and cù sìth are both attested more clearly or routinely in Scottish writing than Irish, so while the pronunciation is very similar, writing it in this form seems less likely to be confusing. Kyoko is referring to them as cats and hounds, but Capinera is familiar with the more specific terms.

The note about gold's conductivity is accurate; silver is the most conductive metal, followed fairly closely by copper, and then more distantly by gold. In order, they have conductivity at room temperature of 63.0×10^6, 59.6×10^6, and 41.1×10^6, all expressed in units of Siemens/meter. Oddly enough, I'd already picked Simeon's name before remembering that this was the unit, so the resemblance there is genuinely coincidental.

On which note, Simeon is a variation of the name Simon, a different transliteration of the same Hebrew name שמעון, referring to one of the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel. Its etymology is uncertain; Christian sources generally cite an etymology derived from "he has heard" as something Leah said regarding a belief that she was not favored as highly by Jacob as Rachel. Rabbinic sources sometimes suggest it's related to "he who listens [to the words of God]", and sometimes relate it to the phrase "there is sin". I do not know why the latter is a name someone would choose to use, but I am not a rabbi and cannot offer more comment than that. Another

secular scholar claims a descent from or cognate status with the Arabic phrase for the offspring of a hyena and wolfess.

The interpretation of this etymology any further is beyond the scope of this note. Regardless, it is (in this use case at least) derived from the Hebrew name and will be pronounced somewhat like Simon, but a form which might be better transliterated phonetically as Shimon.

Epilogue

As in the previous book, the epilogue of this one is in some sense the equivalent of a post-credits scene. There is a fairly extensive description being made of architecture; I apologize if this is excessive, but I enjoy indulging in this kind of thing, and given that it's a relatively important structural layout it seemed valuable in this case.