

chapter one

The child would zone out to these memories of her maker in the commotion and stench of the Mothers on approach like hungry hyenas ready to eat.

The bell stopped chiming when the Mothers had officially arrived on the riverbank the corpse of the Banshee child had once floated up on just like the Others. She'd stopped running into the forest to get away a lifetime ago and now just sat in the box, rapt. She could see no lower than their elbows but was amazed at the baubles, scarves, mink stoles, and flower-encrusted caps with compulsory netting that traipsed around the perimeter of her fortress, straining against the spirits of the ones that had positioned them just so. Feathers danced in cool breezes she could not feel where she sat. Rhinestones and sequins glinted in the sun. Real diamonds dangled from ears as fake pearls swam around a racial assortment of plump necks.

Regardless of the range of nationalities the women represented, the undertone of their skin was the true uniter, the same glistening green that created hues that didn't read logically to her eyes and baffled her senses, especially when she heard them refer to one another as "friend" between their evil jabs at each other.

She knew they all reminded her of what she didn't have to be or bow to. She had passed over, and by doing so had somehow ended up here. In Alt-land.

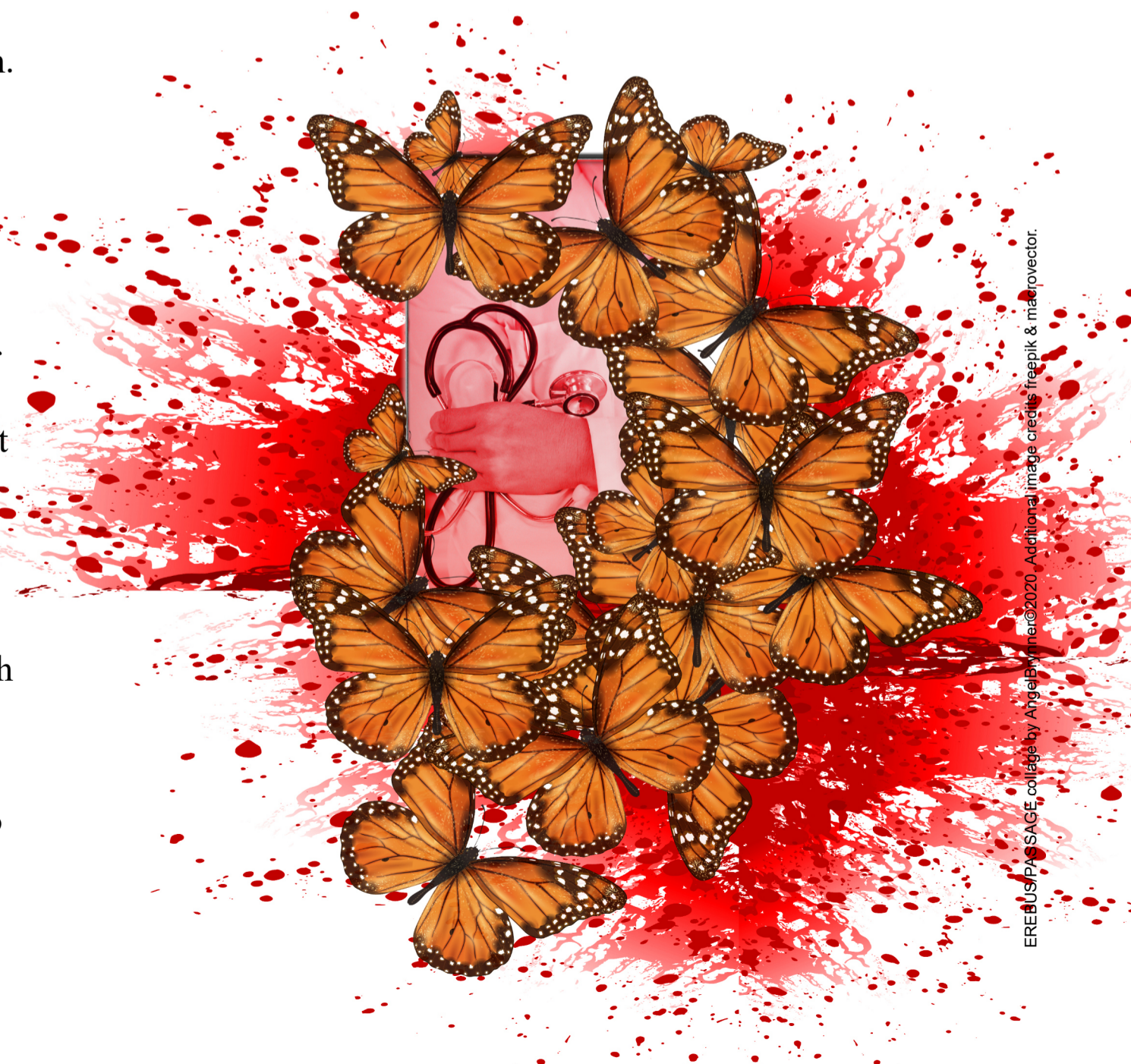
They marched around her box counter-clockwise and talked on the subject of, but not once looked at her. They congratulated each other over the surprisingly swell state of the child they had all abandoned. None of them were concerned with her upkeep but praises were spread thick onto each other's backs just in case, not sure which of their members was secretly taking care of the child for her to be looking as less dead as she did.

Crass remarks in an assortment of global dialects clicked around sucked teeth as the grown women enjoyed trying to out-do one another in the funerary processional, intending with each slur to bury the little child that for some reason would not die again like the others. Malicious words about malnourished protruding bellies, pig noses and big flat feet were peppered in between envious ones about how clear her skin was-even if it had to be that dark. One of the Mothers started to muse about the sweetness inherent in her scent.

"The little thing's stench is kind of like ...manure-"
"She looks like she could dig for truffles with that nose-"
"I don't know whether I should throw a bone-" one started,
"I know! Or ram it through that-" finished another.
"How can something *that* scrawny have feet *that* big?"
"Are you all even sure that's a girl?"
"Equatah-babies be holding their eggs up in there till they're-"
"No wonder they killed her-"
"Ooh!...to have been there for that!" A lady crowed.

They cawed like full-bellied beasts over how impossibly long and resilient the black taffeta ribbons of the child's hair looked as it hung in chunks well past her shoulders. But the pomp and circumstance of cat-walking for one another and the scathing outfit critiques that could make the strongest drag queen cry slowly lost their verve.

The backhanded compliments tossed in the direction of her and her unseen creator wore thin and the ladies became rather bored with themselves.



The little girl sat trying to quietly define what type of beast they were to her. They eyed her indifferent demeanor after their verbal attacks with lightly veiled alarm. The sun moved to a position in the green grass toned sky that cast harsh shadows upon the faces of ladies.

Suddenly, one of them was actually moved by the unnecessary cruelty of it all. A woman with a clump of wild curly hair and skin the color of a pecan sandy peered into the box and saw a very real little girl taking all of them in precociously. The feathers festooned on the cookie-coloured lady's cap blew in the wind like a consoling breeze hitting the body of a dead bird. It made the Banshee child smile as she thought of The Aleph on off-council days and of birds falling out of trees in adoration at her maker's voice. The woman took the child's soft smile as recognition of something impressive in her outside of her dead sense of style and let out her first peal of unaffected laughter since she'd crossed over and been sequestered within this clique.

Instantly intrigued and ravenously jealous by her hoot of delight, the other bored evil women crowded around the edge of the box in search of entertainment. Bloated and pinched faces loomed overhead like vultures ready to strike either the child or the "friend" that was having more fun than they were. The little Banshee girl got the attention due a shivering, flea-bitten puppy who they wanted to both beat and see beg to be fed a scrap of bone with no meat on it.

They all cooed at her, clicking their forked tongues in an attempt to lure the child into webs of false intimacy so the blood would flow faster for the communion they'd all come together for. The pecan sandy lady forgot where she was and what she was actually dealing with, the sudden envy of her so-called friends having made her heady. The lady purred at the wild child. The child looked at her maker, Aleph. The God was more real to her than all those present denying her existence. The Aleph dramatically caught the girl's eye and gazed off to the east. The child imitated her.

"And look at that! Is that a picture?" The pecan sandy lady cooed and pointed to a stick-figure drawing on the cardboard box, ignoring the baleful hiss the child began to emit. "What Are You?! Deaf?!" The feather lady snapped, her odd lisp making THs of Fs.

Her friends sneered and leaned in closer to the sound of her being rejected. She roughly reached towards the child to begin breaking the bread of the little girl for the feast of communion they'd come together for in the first place. All hell broke loose when her hand hit the kid's hair. On contact, the wrath of The Aleph exploded through the child.

The little Banshee jumped up and grabbed the pecan sandy lady by the hair as her feral nails dug into the jowls along the woman's neck. She lunged and bit into her face and spat a chunk of it into the face of one of the ladies who'd also planned to lunch on her. Whatever the child caught hold of was ripped open as the god Aleph held the maelstrom up at arm's length, making the child seem to levitate as her arms whirled like a chain-saw.



She sunk her teeth into the women again and again, immortally wounding them with each inhalation of their blood that she took into her mouth and then spat it out roughly, howling, blood that they had stolen from her and her boxed-in friends out of ritual both here and below. The child cursed in tongues, baying like an animal in a tornado of blood and brimstone as she tackled one child-killing Munchausen Mother after another.

The Aleph waited to pry the offended creature off of them until most of the stolen blood had been poured back into the ground, ensuring that from that point onward, the kabal of Mothers wouldn't return to harm anything else that had made it up out of this stretch of the river.

"Is she death? No, she's not Death-" drawled The Aleph at the wounded backs of that particular council as they fled into and across the river on broken hands and bloodied knees.

The only ones left next to the river were the Banshee child and one of the two who'd quietly made her anew after she'd come through, ones who let her be however she wanted without insult or injury. The Aleph was re-situating the child in her cardboard fort before the kid realized that she had nothing to fear in the river anymore because she was finally allowed to fight back.

"No more hiding deep in the trees anymore, huh little one?" the Aleph smiled sweetly.