-**Prologue**-

An exemplary student. Straight-A report card, little to no altercations with other students, athletic, well-liked and, above all, kind. Lola Barns personified all of those. She never fell below the top two percent in classes, she avoided problematic people, excelled in sports and took the time to help anyone in trouble. It was a lonely life.

But at least she had the respect and support of her parents. They fed her, clothed her, monitored her, accompanied her wherever she went. Anyone she’d had the chance to consider a friend were chased away by them, always explained as having a dirty past or that they just wanted to take advantage of her kindness. She had no reason to doubt them, being her parents and all. Not to mention their church taught her to obey.

The problem there stemmed from her intelligence. Being pushed toward academic excellence left her open to outside influence, no matter how they tried, and Lola found what she was missing; freedom. Of course, she understood that some people had it far worse, however she couldn’t do anything for them beyond donate and offer a prayer. She could help herself, though.

That was why she worked so hard to get accepted into a college of her choice. One several states away. It took a while to convince her parents to let her, including a promise that she would attend video call them every Sunday so they could attend church together, and that she would give updates at least once a day. She could tolerate that much. All that mattered was she’d be out from beneath their thumb.

Lola rarely let her emotions shine through. Acting out was the devil’s work. Or so her parents claimed. However, she couldn’t resist the squeal and jumps that followed her receiving the letter that would finally jump start her life. It must’ve been too much excitement, since she got light-headed and passed out immediately afterwards. She woke up in a hospital, her mother’s distraught face overhead and her father’s distressed voice shouting from a hallway. Three words burned her ears like wicked hell fire; stage-four cancer.

No. No, that couldn’t… it wasn’t fair. She did everything right. She behaved. She listened. She obeyed.

Yet that did nothing to stop her deterioration. Treatments were just as much torture as the actual sickness. All her strength drained away. The body she cultivated turned to flesh and bone. All the achievements she’d made meant nothing. All those verses she’d recited from memory, all the prayers…

Her parents were at her side constantly, but they offered no salvation from it. Lola had lost the proverbial lottery, the one that determined whether a person could live into adulthood. She appreciated her parents support, but their perpetual cycle of prayers irked her to no end. Couldn’t they just shut up? This proved, without a doubt, that all those words were empty.

Still, it was all she knew as well. Everyday, she begged whatever god might’ve been listening to help her. To slow the decay within. To give her a miracle like the pastor so often perpetuated. Yet nothing. She got weaker and weaker, the beeping of machines was a constant companion, her only real distraction from the dreadful ache in her fingers, toes, nose, lips, jaw, eyes, ears… everything. Until… it stopped.

She looked around and saw all of her family, their faces contorted with sorrow. Her parents worst of all. Why was Father not comforting Mother? That question never got answered as darkness took her. So this was it? Death?

Lola had to appreciate it. No more pain. No more hearing how the doctors could do nothing. She’d be free once and for all. Except, she never got the chance to find it herself.

*“Please… if anyone can hear me… just one more chance… a new life… one my parents never would’ve given me… the complete opposite.”*

A dot of light that reminded her of the hospital lights appeared in the void. Lola drifted toward it, the blinding glare stretching forth to consume everything in sight, until it supplanted the void. Then she was pressed against something tight, and wet. What was this?

Suddenly the glare dulled. She still couldn’t see and tried wiping at her eyes, but her arms didn’t have the strength. It took a few minutes, however she finally managed to force her eyelids up and what she saw chilled her to the bone. All she could do was cry.

Who, or what, were these things? She was held by some giant. They had arms and legs, so a humanoid, however the skin was a shimmering navy, distinctly not human. Lola squirmed in their grip, but her body was weak, frail. They handed her to another giant, this one had violet skin and a strangely nice smell. A comforting one.

Panicking would do no good. She needed to get a read of her surroundings first. Whatever these things were, they clearly weren’t trying to hurt her yet. Not that they could do much worse than the cancer already robbing her strength. Strange, though, she didn’t feel the ache. Focus, Lola!

Turning her head around, she found technology all around. Not unlike what she expected, yet distinctly new. It all resembled the weird machines she saw in those science-fiction movies her parents didn’t know she watched. The thing holding her was on a bed, with more of the same creatures around, their skin all different colours or shades. Looking up, their faces were also very human, just… beautiful.

Lola had to stare. She remembered glancing at magazines at the supermarket and all those girls at school that spent hours a day painting themselves to appear even more beautiful, yet none compared to these ‘people’. What of the one holding her? She looked up and froze once more. They were smiling down at her, not in the proud way her mother had done, or the stern one her father wore. What was that expression?

Love?

The person, a woman Lola noticed when she glanced down and saw an impressive chest, was saying something. She couldn’t understand it, but another woman walked into view, this one with pink skin and oddly floating hair. Were those sparks zapping between the follicles? They exchanged words, sharing the same loving smile.

Why did she feel so soothed by their faces? What did these strange people mean to her? Lola opened her mouth, hoping that maybe they’d understand English, but nothing came out of her mouth except a weird coo. She tried again, which made the two chuckle. The more attempts she made, the harder they laughed. The sounds were oddly whimsical and infectious. She couldn’t resist joining in.

They continued talking, possibly to her, while others wandered around. A set of clothes appeared from the corner of her eye. She followed them as they neared her, eyes finally drifting down to herself. What… what happened to her skin? And her arms… and legs? They were so stubby. But, more importantly, why did her skin look like glossy, pink plastic? She looked like the people around her.

Her mind finally caught on. These people weren’t necessarily giant, she was tiny. A newborn. Lola whipped her head around to stare at the beautiful people cooing over her and reached out a puny hand. A finger appeared and she latched onto it, fascinated by the feel of their skin, but also the realisation it pushed upon her.

The woman holding her had just birthed her. Did that mean the other one was also her mother? Lesbians… her parents always said they were sinners. To be tolerated the way one would with the mentally ill.

Her prayer… ‘the complete opposite’? No wait, more importantly, it worked! She didn’t know what god it was, whether the one her family worshipped finally saw the unfairness forced upon her, but that didn’t matter anymore. She was reborn!

***Chapter 01:***

I struggled a lot at first. It was hard for anyone to adjust to a sudden change in environment, even moving to a new town could take a while, but I wasn’t just in a different town, or even another country. This was a whole other planet. I thought it might’ve been the future, like that old Planet of the Apes movie, but I discovered otherwise one day.

Growth was fast. In just a few days, I was crawling. I think that surprised my new parents, though not nearly as much as I expected, what did shock them was my curiosity. The house was incredible. Automated doors, screens everywhere they could be, floors cleaned by adorable little robots that were treated like beloved pets. I did the same.

My curiosity brought me to a study. It took a while for me to figure it out, but I found my way up to the desk, where a strange orb was sat. Part of me trembled at the thought of uncovering some big secret, like my new family were actually leaders of a rebel cell, but I’m almost certain this society has no need for rebellion. There were purposeful cracks across the orb, yet nothing I tried opened it. Was it inert?

Then one of my new mothers came in and saw me. I thought she’d scold me, just as my father had when I was in his office, but she didn’t. Instead, she sat me in her lap and opened it for me. I still didn’t understand the language, though I was beginning to pick up on things. After she pressed a few buttons, suddenly light expanded throughout the room. I flinched, but knew I was safe. When the light stopped, I could do nothing but gawk around me.

An entire galaxy surrounded us. My mother, the one who gave birth to me, started pointing around at planets and stars. She said a few words as she pointed, the names I assumed, then lifted me up and made swiping gestures with her finger. I copied her with my full arm and the scene changed to something I recognised. This was Earth’s solar system, but missing several planets. Including Earth. My old parents never let me study space much. They claimed it ‘was an affront against God to explain His domain’. So I studied it in secret whenever I could.

I started pointing to where I knew various planets should be, making sounds like their names. My new mom chuckled and seemed to play along. We stayed there for hours until I couldn’t keep it up any longer and fell asleep in her blue arms.

Over the coming weeks, I adjusted to the language. I learned the names of my mothers. The blue one, who gave birth me to me, was Lex-Ti, and the one that somehow sired me, was Shiara. Well, ‘somehow’ became obvious after a while. This society was far less… shameful than Earth’s was.

My parents didn’t wear much. Often, they’d be in underwear even when we were outside. As were so many others. Those that covered up more did it for a sense of fashion. The styles weren’t too unlike the ones I knew. I recognised punk attire, glamorous dresses, even cheerleader uniforms. Because of this lack of embarrassment about baring their bodies, I quickly discovered that ‘men’ were a foreign concept to these people. There were ‘women’ to take their place. Or ‘futanari’ as I heard they were called.

I can’t say I missed seeing boys that much. I could never describe the feeling, even to myself, but I was always more drawn toward girls, not that I was averted to male genitalia. Masculinity just didn’t captivate me the way it did lot of others in my old life.

Development was strange in this new life. I was only a month old by the time my body developed enough to walk. That made it easier for me to wander into Lex-Ti’s study and use her astrology device on my own. There were other systems contained in it, all revealing planets, stars and even new constellations. I could never get tired of it.

She noticed that too. Everyday, when she wasn’t too busy, we’d sit down together and she’d tell me all about the planets they’d discovered. Our race, the Gu-Roth-Fu were a space-faring species. We’d discovered the technology long before my rebirth, as such they’d gone around dozens of planets. I hadn’t seen any other aliens on the planet, but Lex-Ti assured they were out there.

I think another month since my rebirth, I resembled a five-year-old. My new parents decided it was time for me to go to school. I was terrified, but that was tempered by excitement. While my studies were dictated by my old parents, I did enjoy learning more and more, and in this society I could learn so much.

“Lola! Are you dressed?” Lex-Ti called. I came down the stairs in what I thought would be appropriate attire. It was a simple, white dress, one that covered me from the neck down, with cute frills. I added a blue ribbon for a little flare. Fashion was never my strong suite before, however I thought this looked alright. My new mother frowned when she saw me.

We had printers for clothes here. Apparently they weren’t very common, though I suppose not all technologies could advance the way space travel did. This meant I could’ve had any kind of outfit. Even one with a bunch of blinking rainbow lights. But they just… it didn’t feel right. Pride was a sin. To dress so flashily would make me guilty of it.

Shiara just shrugged and led me out the door to our car. With interplanetary exploration so developed, it only made sense our vehicles were exceptional too. No wheels or gassy exhausts here. The ‘drive’ was smooth, though the closer we got, my leg kept bouncing in place. Lex-Ti laid her hand on it, then pulled me onto her lap, bouncing her legs with me on it. I giggled despite my nerves.

“It’ll be fun, Bunny.” That was her nickname for me. Rather, it was another animal that resembled a rabbit. We’d gone to the zoos a few times, where I saw so many creatures, some straight from a movie, others that boggled my mind. My fascination with them might’ve been why they bought a few home the next day, including the ‘bunny’ for which I was named.

“I know. I’m just excited.” I hadn’t met anyone my age yet, so I had no idea what to expect honestly. They couldn’t be like me, unless our species was comprised of reborn people taken before their time? I could only guess at what would happen.

The school building wasn’t anything exceptional. It resembled the ones from Earth, just sleeker. As we pulled up, I took a deep breath. Don’t get in trouble. Head down. Behave. Don’t get in trouble. Head down. Behave.

I repeated those words over and over in my head as Lex-Ti helped me out of the car. There were dozens of other girls my age. None of them were futanari. Were they segregated? No, this place didn’t strike me as somewhere that would do that. My new mothers hugged me and kissed my cheeks, something I didn’t remember my old parents ever doing unless I performed well, then I was on my way. They watched the whole time until a burgundy-skinned woman called us in. Then I was alone.

Being the first day, we weren’t taught much. Based on the activities - reading aloud, counting numbers, a game of who could do the silliest dance - I suspect they were testing how developed we were. Naturally, I excelled. I’d already taken to reading, wanting to understand my new language as best I could, and the numerical system was basically the same as Earth’s. The dance was tricky, since I didn’t do any form of self-expression, but I displayed adequate mobility. We all got a toy of our choice for participation.

Except one girl. She had the most normal skin colour I’d seen, that being a rich bronze tone, and had a plumper figure than everyone else. From what I overheard she was a late admission to the class, so the teacher didn’t have time to prepare a toy for her. So she floated among the others, trying to join in their play. When she came to me, I ignored her. This was my first day. I shouldn’t get involved with anyone. They might not be suitable.

After she tired of trying to get my attention, she moved onto another pair. They didn’t appreciate her attempt at friendship. Instead of doing the normal thing and ignoring her, the two got up and pushed the girl away. They shouted something about how she wouldn’t get their toys. She just wanted to play with them. Hardly worth getting upset over.

But they weren’t thinking logically of course. I had to remember that these were actual children. I looked around for our teacher, but only saw her through a window in the door. She was talking with someone, unaware of the havoc about to take place. The two girls were still yelling, now insulting the bronze-girl’s figure. Wasn’t anyone else going to do something? No, of course not. It was only natural to avoid being targeted as well.

I tucked her chin down and fiddled with my toy. It resembled a dog. I recalled the bronze girl looking at me when I took it. She must’ve liked the animal too.

A new voice yelled. It was the bronze girl, now being pushed around more. She wasn’t standing down. Why didn’t she just turn away and keep to herself? It’d be easier.

Everyone else was still watching. They really weren’t going to do anything. Maybe I should? No. Head down. Behave. Good girls don’t stick their noses where they aren’t wanted.

The yelling changed to a cry of pain. I looked up and saw the bronze girl clutching her nose. There was a blue liquid leaking out. I’d seen it a couple times before, when my moms accidentally cut themselves when cooking. That was blood.

“Hey!” The girls turned to me. Wait! Was I the one that shouted? Oh no, oh no. Head down. Behave. Nose where it belonged. No matter how often I repeated those words, I was already moving to stand between them. My little hands were clenched tight, shaking. What was I doing? This wasn’t what I’d been taught. Mom would…

I’m an idiot. I’m still thinking like I did on Earth. This is a new life. A new chance! I wasn’t about to waste it. Not again.

One of the girls started shouting at me. I couldn’t hear her words over the thumping in my ears. What happened next felt like someone, or something, stole control over my body. My hand hurt like never before and I saw the girl that was yelling at me had fallen on her butt, clutching her eye. The other one looked at me, then at my fist and dragged her friend away. As they left, the bronze girl came up behind me.

“Yeah! You’d better run!”

“Don’t annoy them,” I said, but she ignored what I said.

“Thanks for helping me.” Her voice was nasally, probably because she was still holding her nose, but she extended her clean hand to me, “Name’s Vivi-Pirin Dettweiler. Vivi for short.”

I shouldn’t get involved. She clearly wasn’t right in the head.

“Lola,” I took her hand and reciprocated her smile. She was cute now that I was looking properly and clearly didn’t share my bland style sense, as her clothes were a chaotic blend of colours and textures. Now I thought about it, most of the other kids had similar garments. When my new parents said it was tradition for kids to dress themselves for school, I thought that meant their parents would intervene somewhere. Apparently not.

I saw her wince as she gripped her nose, “Let me have a look.” With my help, we cleaned her up. The bleeding stopped quickly. I’d noticed Roth-Fu heal pretty fast.

“Thanks again,” Vivi said, then seemed to recall how I ignored her before, “I’ll go bug someone else.”

“Um,” I stopped her, “We could… share. If you want?”

Her face lit up. Literally. I saw sparks reach from her cheeks to the ends of her violet hair. I couldn’t wait to learn more about our kind and figure out why our bodies generated so much electricity of all things. We sat down and set to playing when the teacher came back, none the wiser.

“Did you have a good day?” Lex-Ti asked when the day ended. I waved to Vivi as she got into her parents’ car.

“Yeah,” I giggled, “I made a friend.”