

Apex

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Chapter 1

The year was 2046

At midnight, on a quiet American suburban street stood the large, two-story, modern looking Auclair home. It was among others of the same size but slightly different in design. The quality of the homes suggested they were of an upper-class community. In addition, all of their rooftops were outfitted with solar panels and small spinning wind turbines, housed within protective bird cages. Above the street, a quadcopter police drone known as prones, were monitoring the area. Others for each block were roving the community's perimeter as well.

Muffled sounds of a woman crying and groaning echoed throughout the Auclair home hallways. Lying on the washroom floor, Gwyneth Auclair moaned because she was in the middle of labour. Despite appearing exhausted, she was a gorgeous woman in her late twenties, that of an African and Japanese ethnic background. On the floor next to Gwyneth, was her handsome partner named Rene Auclair, about the same age, currently braced on his knees. He was a blonde haired, blue eyed man that was of a french caucasian ethnicity.

'Push through the pain, you have to try harder,' Rene instructed. 'Breathe, that's it, breathe,' however Gwyneth's slow blinks implied she was dozing off. 'Gwyneth, stay with me. Don't stop trying, you can do this!'

'Okay,' Gwyneth uttered. Yelling even louder, she shook her head, regained focus and pushed.

'You should be in a hospital. Her growth exponentially incre—'

Finally, Gwyneth pushed out their newborn child. Hurrying, Rene wrapped their big, bloody baby in a white towel. From being silent, the baby made quiet giggles. At first, Rene hesitated for he had never encountered a newborn giggling, instead of the usual shrieking sobs.

Out of breath, Gwyneth uttered, 'Is...that giggling I hear?'

Moving on, Rene cut the umbilical cord using scissors. Leaning her head up, Gwyneth took a shaky look upon their now silent baby. When Rene removed the towel wrapped over their baby's face, he unveiled their girl had a head full of black, short hair and pale white skin. Regarding her facial features, they are not chubby but defined and matured. A short moment of silence passed as they gazed upon their abnormal looking girl.

Finally, the rise and fall of her chest gave Rene cause to exhale in relief.

‘Re...Rene, why...isn’t she crying?’

‘I...don’t know, she’s breathing though...*slowly*.’

‘Why does she look like—’

Abruptly, Gwyneth coughed aggressively a few times, so Rene readjusted himself in order to support her neck better.

‘Don't worry, Gwyn, she’s alive,’ Rene assured. While holding their baby, he gently lifted Gwyneth's head and onto his lap. Trembling, yet she smiled when looking up into Rene's eyes.

‘Where's my girl?’ Gwyneth asked, staring at her daughter with tears trickling down her cheeks. Around her body, Rene noticed a pool of blood growing.

‘I’m going to go grab my phone, okay? I'll just be one momen—’

Grabbing ahold of Rene’s wrist, Gwyneth pled, ‘No—’

Quick to look away, Gwyneth coughed, followed by taking in a deep breath.

‘*Gwyn*? I'll be just a moment, I’m...I’m going.’

‘No! Rene...don't leave me.’

‘I...I have to try. I—’

‘She's alive. There was no time. Now...now it is my time,’ Gwyneth determined.

Out of disbelief, Rene shook his head and trembled to say, ‘Gwyneth?’

In response, she told him, ‘I...know you'll do great by her, Rene. Ju—’

‘No...*we*, will do great by her.’

‘Just...just promise me,’ Gwyneth requested.

‘Anything,’ he asserted.

‘Don't let...make sure she tries her best, o...okay?’

‘Of course,’ Rene confirmed and nodded.

‘You...you need, to push her. Push her to be better...the best you...’

Slowly, Gwyneth gently set her head down onto Rene's lap. Now she was looking up at the ceiling, appearing to be staring off into space.

Seconds later, Gwyneth's body went limp.

‘No...*Gwyneth*?’ Appearing jittery, Rene placed his forefingers onto Gwyneth's neck. For a short lapse of time, he held them there. Breaking out into a reluctant weep, Rene vowed, ‘I promise...I'll try, Gwyneth...I will. I love you.’ Holding both dead wife and his baby girl in each arm, Rene pulled them close to his chest and sobbed. Looking down at his daughter, Rene witnessed the slow opening of her eyes for the first time. Her shiny, silver greenish coloured eyes surprised Rene and caused him to widen his

own. A dead silent moment passed until Rene's daughter took in a single, deep breath. '*Iris*,' Rene named her.

Still covered in Gwyneth's blood, Rene switched on the light within his office. When he did, Iris grunted, shut her eyes and stuffed her face into Rene's shoulder. Noticing her sensitivity to light, he quickly shut it back off. In that moment of illumination, the outstanding feature was that the office contained twelve-foot high shelves, packed with first edition books. Taking a seat at the office desk, Rene adjusted himself to get comfortable. Placing his hand onto Iris's chest, Rene drew his attention to the hand-clock hanging over the office doorway. When the clock's second hand surpassed just a few seconds, he shook his head and furrowed his eyebrows.

'Double beats?' Rene whispered. In the near distance, ambulance sirens could be heard. Over his shoulder and out the office's circular window, he viewed an ambulance just arriving from down the street.

The sun still had an hour yet to set on the Yamada farm. In the middle of its main field, couple metre tall weeping willow tree had been planted in the freshly turned soil. Beside the tree, Gwyneth's urn resided. Still, there was a gap around the weeping willow's base which had been prepped to be filled in with soil. Just in front of this gap, Gwyneth's small, matte black tombstone had been installed. On it read, "Gwyneth Auclair, 2018 - 2046, The only one who stood in my way was myself." A few metres from the tree, Rene was standing there wearing black office attire, holding a baby carrier with a black blanket draped over it. Staring off into space, his facial expression appeared numb. Then, both of Gwyneth's elderly parents, Yamato and Mary Yamada stepped by his side. Mary was an African American woman whereas Yamato was a Japanese man. Both were dressed in dark, conservative looking clothing.

'Hello...Rene,' Mary said, trembling.

In a somber tone, Yamato said, 'Hey, Re.'

'Hey...I can't explain why or how Iris looks the way she does. Not yet at least.'

'What...what are you talking about?' Mary questioned. 'What's wrong with, Iris?'

'Nothing, she is healthy. Take a look but keep the blanket draping over, she seems to be ultra sensitive to light,' Rene instructed, now holding the carrier with both arms. As Yamato gently lifted the blanket covering the carrier, himself and Mary took a peek inside. When they did, Iris took instant notice of them and widened her silver, greenish coloured eyes. Back

and forth, Iris curiously examined Mary and Yamato. The appearance of Iris struck Mary and Yamato to be abnormal, as though Iris was much older.

‘So...different,’ Mary commented.

‘Already so big,’ Yamato added.

‘Be that as she may, Iris is healthy,’ Rene assured.

‘Iris seems like she can already recognize us,’ Yamato pointed out. ‘Wow...hey, hello there, little one,’ he greeted. ‘This is planet earth. It's moving around a star. And that star is moving around a black hole.’

Provoking an eye roll, Mary mumbled, ‘Yamatooo.’

Continuing on, Yamato explained, ‘And that black hole is moving within what we call our universe. And that universe is moving within... inside well...well we don't know that much yet.’ In response, Iris tilted her head, squinted and blinked once.

‘I...I've never seen a baby with such...such...’ Mary tried expressing however she could not find the right words. Letting down Iris's carrier drape, Yamato and Mary focused on Rene.

‘Of course you have already taken Iris to a hospital,’ Mary assumed.

After setting the carrier onto the ground, Rene leaned back up and confirmed, ‘Yeah, once to register her for a birth certificate. Took her with me in Gwyn's ambulance. I'm a doctor, Mary, trust me, I've delivered quite a few babies before. I did the follow up procedures myself.’

‘Of course...that's good to hear,’ Mary concurred.

‘Iris is as healthy as they come, just...’

‘Just what?’ she insisted.

‘In the many babies I have delivered, I've never seen one so matured, as Iris. Her growth was rapid in Gwyn's last couple weeks of only a seven month labour...it doesn't make sense,’ Rene whispered.

‘Are her vitals normal?’ Yamato inquired.

‘She's healthy, Yamato.’

Mary mentioned, ‘Well, I can see why you named her Iris, but are you sure, that she's fine?’ Mary questioned with worry in her voice.

‘She was born two months premature. She grew so fast in just a couple weeks, I don't understand.’ Taking a moment to absorb this information, Mary and Yamato recalled the past few months and realised, it had only been seven months since Gwyneth told them she was pregnant.

‘Did...did you tell the doctors at the hospital about this information?’ Yamato asked with a sense of worry in his tone.

‘No.’

‘*Why not?*’ Mary gasped.

‘I’m not sure what’s different about her but I did the follow up procedures myself...including the paperwork,’ Rene admitted.

‘You scrambled the data,’ Yamato assumed.

‘I had to.’

‘*Why?*’ Mary demanded to know in an angered voice.

‘Iris is showing abnormal physical characteristics. I don’t want her taken away from me, given my initial assessment. She’s different but in a...’

‘Okay okay, can I hold her?’ Mary requested.

‘Like I said, she’s too sensitive to light.’

Letting out a sigh, Mary’s response was, ‘Seriously?’

‘It could make her cry which...I have not heard yet to be honest,’ Rene stated. ‘She moans and groans in the light.’

‘Really,’ Yamato said in disbelief.

‘Well, I don’t want to be the first one to make her cry,’ Mary admitted.

‘Before I leave, you can get the chance to see her inside.’

Furrowing her eyebrows, Mary said, ‘Leaving so soon?’

‘Yeah, I need to pass by the grocery store before I get home.’

‘Ah, I understand,’ Mary replied. A quiet moment passed when she noticed Rene staring straight at Gwyneth’s urn.

‘Gwyneth always had nothing but great things to say about you, Rene,’ Mary shared. ‘Yamato and I are very lucky parents. To have had someone, give our one and only child a truly, happy life. And now you’ve given us our one and only grandchild. Despite how it ended, she always wanted a child.’

‘It was always going to happen this way,’ Yamato asserted. ‘Nature is harsh, but it’s completely natural, Rene. This sort of thing...what happened to Gwyneth was common around a hundred and fifty years ago as you of course, know already. Doesn’t help I know but it’s the cold truth.’

‘It’s a hundred years later, Yamato, I could have been there earlier,’ Rene asserted. ‘She had been stressing over the pain recently but I thought it was just normal, given her pregnant state. Out of nowhere, she collapsed in the washroom without her phone.’

‘Re, don’t do th—’

Before Yamato could finish, Rene continued speaking, ‘I stopped to charge on the way home from the hospital. The very place in time she needed to be. It was too late to call an ambulance when I got there. There was no time left. I...I had to act. I...I had no time, I...’

‘Rene, it’s not your fault,’ Mary asserted, and then gave Rene a hug. After they let go of one another, Yamato beckoned to Rene and the two of

them walked closer to the weeping willow tree.

‘Weeping willows were her favourite,’ Rene said.

‘This is what she wanted,’ Yamato stated. ‘Before you came over, I used the neighbour’s backhoe. Removed a metre deep of dirt, and five meters wide.’

‘Wide?’ Rene inquired.

‘Tree roots grow wider than deeper, with the exception of a couple species of tree. I blended it with the farm’s compost. With Gwyneth’s ashes, this willow will grow mighty I reckon.’ Not responding, Rene kneeled and picked up Gwyneth’s urn. Together, Yamato and Rene spread her ashes around the weeping willow’s base. At the same time, Mary watched as tears fell off her jaw and into the soil beneath her.

Inside Yamada’s dark home kitchen, Rene, Mary and Yamato were standing around Iris’s carrier. From all around, the window blinds were all the way down. Slow and gradual, Rene lifted the blanket up and over Iris’s carrier. Next, he picked her up.

‘Oh my...she seems so aware,’ Mary pointed out. Into her arms, Rene gently placed Iris.

‘Wow, look at her eyes,’ Yamato commented. Stepping back, Rene watched Yamato and Mary get a good look at Iris. Seeing them hold her brought him a relieving joy.

‘So unique,’ Mary said. ‘She may look different but she is now a part of our family.’

‘That’s right,’ Rene affirmed. ‘But uh, I really gotta go now guys, I’m sorry but we’ll make time soon, I promise.’

‘You don’t have to promise me anything Rene. You’re going to need help whether you like it or not.’ Giving Yamato a chance, Mary passed Iris into his arms.

‘True,’ Rene agreed and nodded.

‘Wow, she’s such a big girl.’ After a calm moment, Yamato returned Iris to Rene in order for him to carefully lie her back into the carrier.

‘Well, I’ll reach out.’

‘Thanks for visiting, Rene,’ Mary said, developing a sad expression.

‘Of course, I will again, soon,’ he confirmed. ‘If not soon enough, you’re welcome to drop by when either of you can.’

‘Thank you, take care, Rene, drive safe.’

‘Always, bye for now,’ Rene concluded, picked up Iris’s carrier and then left Mary and Yamato in their kitchen.

It was dark and well past nine o’clock when Rene stepped in front of his home’s front entrance. In one hand, he held Iris, asleep within her

carrier. In his other, he had to set down a heavy bag of groceries to open the door.

After shutting the Auclair home front door, Rene put the groceries onto the floor, as well as the carrier Iris is in. Next, he kneeled to pick her up. Held in both his arms arms, she curiously looked around at her heightened new perspective. Then, Rene received a vibrating notification that someone was calling. In an instant, Iris began looking around frantically. Watching with wide eyes, he witnessed Iris moving her ears up and down and shifting her eyes independently from one another. The act caused Rene to stop and become amazed. Slowly, he picked his phone out of his pocket to find Mary was calling. When using his phone, Iris's full attention became transfixed on him. Holding the phone up to his ear, Rene cleared his throat.

'Mary, hello, what's up?' Rene greeted.

'Hey Rene, just checking in to see how you're doing. Was the trip home okay?' Mary asked. From Rene's phone, Iris could hear Mary's voice. When listening in, her ears moved up and down. In disbelief, Rene was mesmerized by Iris's ability to move her ears. 'Rene...'

'Hey yup, I'm here, trip was fine. I'm doing well, thank you. We just got home from the grocery store. How are you two?'

'We're doing well too, thanks Re, for the update. I meant what I said earlier today, we're here to help.' Exhibiting the same behaviour, Iris paid attention to what Mary was saying. 'We're here if you need anything, anything at all.'

'Thanks...Mary, I appreciate that, truly.'

'You're not in this alone, so call me whenever you need me. She is all I have left of my daughter.'

'Of course, you and Yamato, are welcome over anytime.'

'Thanks Rene, take care okay?'

'I always try to. You too, Mary.'

'Okay, bye for now, goodnight you two.'

'Bye for now, goodnight.' Leaning over, Rene picked up the bag of groceries with Iris in his arms. Next, he waddled into the kitchen.

Seated in a highchair, Iris was looking at Rene unpacking groceries and navigating his phone at the same time. Choosing to play a voice message left from his friend Joe, Rene set his phone down and focused on prepping a late formula dinner for Iris. Looking to Rene's phone with just one eye, her other inspected him prepping milk formula.

'Rene, Joe calling. Don't worry about us here at the hospital. You take the time you need. Let me know if you need any help, or simply just

someone to talk to. I'm here for you, man. You're the best doctor I know. I know you'll make a great father too. Anyways, you know where to find me, bye for now.'

Turning around, Rene looked to Iris focusing both eyes on him.

'Hungry?' In response, Iris smiled.

When Rene sat up in bed, his bedroom clock read, "4:00am." Next, he climbed out of bed and walked over to Iris's crib. On her back, Iris smiled the second she saw him. Smiling back, Rene continued and walked into his washroom.

Two hours later, Rene was awoken by Iris giggling. Still, she was laying on her back, viewing her surroundings.

'Why aren't you sleeping?' Rene questioned quietly to himself. When he finished speaking, Iris giggled as if she heard him say it. Turning to face Iris's crib, Rene watched her reaching with her hands held up high.

The following morning, it was dark in Rene's bedroom. Only thin beams of light shined through the window blind's cracks. Rolling over in bed, he checked on Iris's crib. In it, Iris was laying on her back when suddenly, she sat up on her own. In turn, provoking Rene to rise up quickly himself.

'Iris?' From out of bed, Rene rushed over to her crib. 'How?' Upon Iris's face, she developed a smile when looking up at him. But the moment she did, her head tilted back and unbalanced herself. As a result, she fell onto her back once again. In response, she giggled and with her hands, she reached up towards Rene, who was shaking his head in disbelief.

The kitchen blinds were fully down while Rene ate a bowl of cereal and navigated his phone.

All of the blinds throughout the house were shut and were letting in little light.

Meanwhile, Iris was seated upright in her highchair, drinking a bottle of formula. Positioning his phone in front of Iris, Rene played a short viral cat video. In response, Iris giggled while her ears began moving independently from each other again. Looking closely, Rene could just tell Iris was using each eye independently from one another.

'It's okay, Iris...Iris?' Blinking a couple times, Rene then leaned in towards Iris and watched her intently. 'How are you doing that?'

In front of Iris, Rene had his phone in one hand and a fork in the other.

'Pay attention to both things, okay, Iris?' Responding with a smile,

Iris giggles. Beginning the experiment, he moved his phone and fork in random directions. Following each object, Iris's eyes moved independently from one another, following both the phone and fork. 'Wow,' Rene expressed in a hushed tone.

Holding Iris with both arms, Rene sat down onto the living room couch and let out a long sigh. The room was themed by reddish brown, wooden furniture, dark stained oak floors, walls painted burgundy. Every piece of furniture had a glass window feature, topped with a single, yellow shaded light in the middle of the white ceiling. Taking a moment to relax, Rene closed his eyes and breathed slowly. A couple seconds later, Iris tried moving around. Adjusting her, he opened his eyes and said, 'Iris, no, easy now.' Not letting up, Iris continued fidgeting and moving. Giving up, Rene stood up. 'Okay.' Kneeling down, Rene placed Iris onto the carpet. 'I'll be right back.' With haste, Rene ran out of the living room and upstairs. All while Iris giggled and waddled on her back.

Stepping next to Iris's crib, Rene quickly grabbed a couple stuffed animals and a couple pillows. Right after, he returned to the living room in a hurry.

Coming to a halt, Rene entered the living room to find Iris crawling, dragging her tummy across the carpet. The act caused him to drop his jaw and become wide eyed.

'What?' Rene whispered. As Iris crawled towards him, he slowly walked further into the living room. Gently, he kneeled onto the floor in front of Iris. After setting down the stuffed animals and pillows, he whispers, 'How are you doing this?' With no hesitation, Iris crawled towards one of the small, stuffed animals being a black dog. When Iris reached the dog, she hugged it immediately, resulting in her falling over in the process and making a little roar, which prompted Rene to laugh. While giggling, Iris laid on top of the stuffed dog and hugged it tightly. Fixated on Iris, Rene smiled and shook his head.

Giggles crackled from Iris in the pitch black. It read, "3:00am," on Rene's bedroom clock when he climbed out of bed. Slowly standing up he then walked over to look at Iris sitting up in her crib, holding her stuffed black dog. The emergence of Rene caused Iris to smile and giggle even more.

'Still not sleeping, are we?'

A week later in Rene's bedroom, he rolled over in bed and viewed the light beams shining through the window blinds. To view Iris's crib, he had

to shift his position slightly. Blinking a couple times, Rene saw Iris standing up in her crib and holding onto its railing. Rene lunged up, grabbed his phone off the bedside table, fell out of bed, and then then rushed over to the crib. On the way, he turned his phone on and set it to video. When he arrived there, he looked down while simultaneously filming her, looking back up at him. By using her knees, Iris raised herself slightly up and down, still holding onto the crib's railing. The act provoked her to smile and as a result, revealed newly grown front teeth. Squinting, Rene shook his head and said quietly, 'It's...too soon.' Placing one hand onto her shoulders, Rene made Iris giggle. *Is this a dream?* And when he scooped her up and into his arms, she squealed in laughter. 'We'll figure this out, Iris.'

With Iris in both arms, Rene walked into the dark living room, lit by only a few long stick candles. Now in its middle, he kneeled and gently set Iris down onto the floor. He placed her within a makeshift couch cushion playpen, stuffed with stuffed animals and pillows.

'I didn't plan on you needing a playpen this soon,' he said, watching Iris crawl towards the stuffed black dog. When she gives the black dog a hug, Rene takes a seat on the couch, Rene finally laid his head back and relaxed. After grasping the television remote, Rene turned the television on. The television sounds and images instantly grabbed ahold of Iris's attention. Her left eye looked to the left as her right eye continued looking forward. Next, Iris pivoted left to pay full attention on the television. Due to the bright TV, Iris squinted her eyes but kept watching the animal documentary from Rene's recent playlist. Rather than the television, he looked out for Iris's reaction. With no hesitation, Iris started crawling forward until she used both of her arms to pull herself up on the cushion walls. Now standing, Iris gazed upon the bright television screen, illuminating her face. Using the remote, Rene switched off the television and consequently, Iris's eyes widened. Crouching forward on the living room carpet, Rene said softly, 'Iris.' Her attention was summoned so she rotated just her head; almost halfway around. However Iris could not turn her head around any further so she let go of the couch cushion. From only a metre away, Rene reached out quickly and held his arms out around Iris. Suddenly, Rene witnessed her dilating her pupils and then stepped back to catch herself from falling over. 'Iris...hold it...that's it.' Lowering his arms, Rene let Iris stand on her own. Still a little shaky, she managed to keep her balance. The expression Rene had on his face was shocked with his jaw dropped. For balance, Iris raised her arms. Frozen in place, he shook his head and wondered, 'How?' Glancing down, Iris checked her feet, followed by looking back up at Rene. Once again, she looked back at her feet and

attempted to take a step. Reacting out of instinct, Rene automatically held out his arms for support. 'Sloooowly.' By using her arms for balance, Iris took her second step. 'That's it,' he whispered, now witnessing her third step closer. 'Good!' he encouraged. 'Come on, keep going.' Then to one side, Iris overly leaned. Reaching out, Rene attempted to catch her. First dilating her pupils, Iris moved backwards and caught herself from falling to the floor. The act made Rene raise his eyebrows, smile and utter, 'I can't believe this is happening...almost...you can do it.' With one last step, Iris walked into Rene's arms. 'Yeah! Wow! You did it, Iris!' With both hands, he held Iris balanced by her shoulders. For a moment of silence, he looked into her eyes as her pupils contracted back to normal. 'Why? But first, how?'

Nearing the afternoon, Rene was in his kitchen. Alone, he was holding his cellphone to his ear while looking around the corner and into the living room. Waddling around, Iris practiced moving with each step, at times, using the couch cushion playpen to hold onto, a sight which sent chills down his spine. Now blocking the living room entrances, boundary blanket barricades have been tacked in so Iris could not exit.

A few more telephone rings sounded off until Joe answered, 'Re, hey man, how are you?' Rene noticed Iris looking right at him, with her ears moving up and down. 'Rene?'

'Hey...Joe, I'm good, I am good, good thanks. What are you up to? I hope it is not a bad time to call.'

'Nothing much right now, no worries. Gotta get back into the O.R by noon. What's up?'

'If it's no problem, how about after your shift you could swing by and get to meet Iris. Over a beer of course. To be honest I could go for one right now.'

'I bet being a single father is tough, no doubt. I'd be happy to drop by for a while. How is Iris?'

'She's doing great,' Rene answered.

'That's good, that's good. She ain't keeping you up too much at night, is she?'

'Not with her crying. I don't think I've heard her cry yet.'

'Wait...really, not once?'

'No, she just makes grunts, groans and giggles occasionally,' Rene informed.

'Not even during her child birth?'

'No.'

‘Huh...that’s odd.’

‘Odd...yeah, that’s one word to describe her.’

‘Sounds like you lucked out, no?’

‘Luck would be an understatement.’

‘I hope I get to experience being a dad one day but for now, it’s allllllll about me right now,’ Joe finished with a chuckle.

‘A chapter I thought I was prepared for,’ Rene admitted.

‘Oh c’mon man, you’re being too tough on yourself. You’re a single father. That wasn’t a part of your plan, but a part of your chapter nonetheless. I know you’re man enough to take care of her. I believe in you Re, and I’m not just saying that. I’ve known you for too long now to have seen enough supporting evidence to state that I do in fact, believe in you.’

‘Thanks Joe, that means a lot because it’s coming from you.’

‘My man I’ll be there sometime around seven? Sound good?’ Joe proposed.

‘Sounds perfect, see you then, Joe.’

‘Later,’ he concluded, to then hung up. Looking down, Rene found Iris standing right at the blanket boundary, eyes just poking over, looking over its edge and at him smiling.

As Rene watched television from the couch, Iris was standing next to him, watching too but wearing Rene’s retro sunglasses. The animal documentary on cheetahs was amazing her with each shot of high definition detail. Interrupting, the doorbell rung and activated Iris’s ears to move up. Additionally, her pupils dilated.

Looking to Iris, Rene told her, ‘Easy, easy, Iris, it’s okay.’ While Iris’s one eye looked at him, the other pointed towards the doorbell ringing again. ‘I’ll be right back, stay here okay?’ First standing back up, Rene turned around and left the living room by stepping over the blanket boundary. Right when he left, Iris waddled away in order to hide, utilizing the furniture as hand railings.

Opening the front door, Rene found Joe standing there with a six pack of beer.

‘Reeee,’ Joe greeted taking a step forward. Reaching out, he shook Rene’s hand and leaned in for a hug. Of a Chinese ethnicity, Joe was about the same age as Rene but a little smaller. He was still dressed formally as a doctor, with pens in his shirt pocket and wearing electronic glasses.

‘Joe, it’s great to see you man, come on in.’ After Joe entered, Rene closed the door behind him.

'I'm glad you called, I'm always here for ya, Re,' Joe sincerely said.

'Thanks, I appreciate it.' Offering Rene the case of beer, Joe then leaned over and took off his shoes. 'Truly.'

After rising back up, Joe asked, 'Where's the little one?'

'Just over there, in the living room.'

'Let's go see her,' Joe said but before he could make a couple steps, Rene stopped him by placing a hand on his forearm.

'Wait...just a moment, Joe,' Rene requested.

'What's...up? What's wrong?' he asked and tilted his head.

After taking his hand back, Rene mentioned, 'There is something different...about Iris.'

'Different how?'

'I can't explain it yet with what little data I currently have. You will have to just see her to believe me.'

Behind the living room couch, Iris listened intently on Joe and Rene speaking. At the same time, her ears are moving up and down.

Nodding in agreement, Joe told Rene, 'Okay well, let's just do that. I told Erin I'd only be here for a couple hours or so, so let's get to it.'

Attempting to enter the living room again, Joe was stopped once more by Rene reaching out to him.

'Just...just wait. Joe, Iris is already walking,' Rene shared. First letting out a scoff, Joe shook his head and chuckled. However Rene's expression remained serious.

'What?' Joe questioned.

'Yeah.'

'Don't play with me right now, I've had a long day and I still gotta—'

'Plus, she looks different. More, mature, bigger than you'd expect so...so just don't freak out okay?'

'*You're serious?*' Joe asked in disbelief.

'I swear it by Gwyneth's grave, Joseph.' The remark made by Rene prompted Joe to also raise his chin. Thereafter he squinted and developed a worried look upon his face. 'I haven't introduced Iris to anyone yet. Except for her grandparents.'

'What about when you brought her to the hospital?'

'I'll get to that part.'

'Uh oh...did you do something illegal, Re?'

'Since then she has exponentially grown. I invited you over tonight to see a friend and also, to get a second, professional opinion. Plus, I know I can trust you, Joe. You've been good to me in the past and...and—'

'We've been there for each other,' Joe replied and smiled.

‘Okay so, let me go in there first and pick her up,’ Rene instructed.
‘All right.’

Stepping into the room, Rene found Iris just hiding behind the couch, with one eye poking around its corner.

‘Iris, Iris come here,’ Rene asked nicely. In front of Iris, he kneeled and smiled. ‘Iris, there is someone I’d like you to meet, okay?’ After picking Iris up, he stood and it caused her to giggle. Behind Rene, Joe stepped into the room but still could not see her. By turning around, he unveiled Iris to Joe. The sight of Joe forced her to instantly become silent; including himself. ‘This man is father's friend all right? His name is Joe.’

Stunned by Iris’s appearance, Joe dropped his jaw and developed a blank looking expression, scrambling to say, ‘Oh...oh my...’

‘Yeah.’ Stepping closer, Joe was transfixed upon Iris, whom was also studying him as well.

‘Really?’ Joe uttered softly. Letting out a deep breath, Rene nodded once. ‘Her skin colour, grey almost. And her...eyes.’ Developing furrowed eyebrows, Iris turned and placed her face into Rene's chest.

While patting Iris on her back, Rene told her, ‘It's okay Iris, Joe is our friend.’

‘Two...two weeks?’ Joe clarified.

‘Two weeks tomorrow,’ Rene confirmed. ‘I’ve never seen or heard of any case such as this.’

‘I don't think anyone has, Re.’

‘I registered her at the hospital myself but that's it.’

‘And?’

‘I scrambled it and made her average,’ Rene told him.

‘You did what?’

‘Despite showing different symptoms, she was and she is healthy. And now, what I have seen thus far in person...she's different, more, not less.’ Slowly, Iris turned her head out from Rene's chest to look at Joe, looking back at her. Leaning in, he obtained a better look of Iris.

‘Her eyes,’ Joe highlighted again. ‘Are you sure she's healthy?’

‘I check her vitals everyday. I monitor and inspect everything I can. I can't explain it yet. Not until I have real instrumentation to analyze her on a deeper level.’

‘Maybe...you should take her in because she isn't normal,’ Joe affirmed.

‘Exactly, it’s not *normal* at all, Joe. I'm afraid of what they might say...what they might do. Due to the fact that she isn’t, *normal*. They would do what's abnormal to this abnormal, person,’ Rene determined.

‘That’s why you forged her registration,’ Joe presumed and to confirm, Rene nodded. Taking a seat on the couch, Joe looked down and contemplated the situation for a couple seconds. Looking up, he asked, ‘So, you’re just going to wait it out? And see how she turns out?’

‘I have no choice. This is the safest way for my daughter. Imagine what the world would do if they witnessed a newborn baby, walking around, looking like...Iris.’ Leaning over, he set Iris down onto her feet. Next, he stepped back and gave her room to stand. At first Iris stayed put in one spot; which alone amazed Joe. With a smile Iris started walking towards him, dropping his jaw on her way over. Now standing right in front of him, she giggled and stared at his different details.

‘This...this is incredible...unbelievable. I...I can't believe what I'm seeing.’ Beside Joe, Rene took a seat on the couch.

‘Joe.’

Looking to Rene, Joe asked, ‘What?’ As Joe and Rene spoke, Iris glanced back and forth.

‘Joe, this has to remain just between us,’ Rene implored.

‘Of course.’

‘I invited you here because I trust you. For now, you can't even tell Erin because she'll want to see Iris too. We'll give it some time before—’

‘Of course, Rene, I understand. You can trust me. I’m honoured you trust me...I mean, you invited me here for crying out loud.’

‘I’m so sorry to put you into a position where you’re technically lying to Erin; it’s not right.’

‘You didn’t ask for this, Rene. This is not your fault for having to ask for help. Question is, what are you going to do, when Iris grows up?’

‘I don't know. I'm taking care of Iris one day at a time. Each day is a leap in capability. We will have to wait and see. But man, I may have not asked for Iris to be like Iris but can I ask for a favour, from you?’

‘You can count on me,’ Joe responded without flinching.

‘If I gave you some of Iris's bio-samples, could you conduct some tests at the hospital?’

‘Done,’ Joe approved.

‘Just bring in Iris's samples when conducting other tasks in the lab. Mix her samples in with other patients’ samples, you know?’

‘I know. Rene, remember that one time we tested our own DNA, off the books? I found out I was quarter Mongolian. We were just messing around. Really no different from what we will be doing to test Iris.’

While nodding, Rene recommended, ‘Get it done at your pace. Rushing only increases the risk of error.’

‘I will, I won’t mess this up, don’t sweat it.’

‘Joe, this can't get out. I could lose Iris, we could lose our jobs. You know this. So make no hard or digital copies. Just take pictures off the screen.’

With a sense of sarcasm, Joe said, ‘If this gets out it is because I got caught doing unregistered tests on a child who’s registration had been forged. Everything is at stake, got it.’ After patting Joe’s back, both him and Rene looked at Iris paying attention to them. When she realised they are looking at her, she smiled from ear to ear.

‘I wonder what’s...what is different about her. Why she is the way she is,’ Joe posed.

‘Before we ask the question why, we must first answer the question how. How she is the way she is. Only then, can we ask why she is the way she is.’

‘What else, has Iris done?’

‘Watch this,’ Rene said excitedly, while picking up two items, being a beer and his phone.

Wearing child sized sunglasses with small, pieces of cardboard for side blinders, Iris was held by Rene stepping out into the sunny, Auclair home backyard. The sunglasses held onto her face by a rubber band wrapped around her head. Still, Iris was squinting a bit because of the bright outdoor environment. From smiling, she developed a serious expression, prompting Iris to dilate her pupils when looking around independently with each eye. The backyard consisted of a patio, a few gardens, a couple large trees and a rustic, wooden tool shed. In its middle, a large, well groomed lawn occupied most of the yard’s real estate.

‘Let me get a look of you,’ Rene said as he shifted Iris to get a better view of her eyes. ‘How are you? Your eyes okay? They seem to be working, as usual.’ In response, Iris giggled, making Rene smile and nod. ‘I’ll take that as a yes.’

Off of the backyard patio, Rene carried Iris onto the lawn. While her eyes were moving independently from one another, her head was on a swivel.

‘What's this place in space? We're outside, Iris. We came from inside.’ Kneeling, Rene gently set Iris onto the grass. On both knees and hands, Iris felt the grass. Showing no hesitation, she crawled a metre away from Rene and giggled in the process. Using both arms, Iris propped herself up slowly. The image of her standing outside was so profound for Rene that

it evoked him to tear up, *'wish you were here Gwyneth.'* For a short moment, he watched Iris scanning from left to right. Then, she stopped and looked up. The sight of the blue sky paralyzed Iris for she was stunned by its size. Suddenly, the wind blew through Iris's short black hair. Resulting in her eyes to widen at the feel of the wind, followed by turning around to face Rene with a worried expression. Stepping forth, he joined Iris by kneeling in front of her. *'Oh it's okay, Iris. It's just the wind, and the wind is...well...the wind is...never mind. In time you'll learn.'* The wind continued blowing gently as Iris gazed up into Rene's eyes. With pursed lips, Iris blew into Rene's face. Widening his eyes, he shook his head in disbelief. *'Wind,'* he recited, as he blew air into her face. The exchange sparked laughter out of her whereas it made Rene chuckle, smile and even squeeze out a couple more tears of joy. Giving no warning, Iris turned quickly and walked away before Rene could reach out to stop her. *'Sloooow, slower, Iris,'* Rene commanded, however she did not listen. Picking up the pace, Iris giggled while making her way around the backyard. In due course, she eventually arrived at the backyard's largest pine tree. Coming to an abrupt halt, she looked up. For a short moment, she stared at its branches. Directing her attention to the ground, Iris found a straight stick, roughly the length of her body. Once she walked over to it, she leaned over to pick it up. Thereafter Iris turned around and faced Rene holding his arms out like a tree. *'Tree!'* Answering him with a nod, Iris then mimics Rene. She did with the stick in her hand, serving as a branch. *'Branch!'* Rene cheered as he waved his arm, indicating a tree's branch. Turning around, Iris reached out and touched the tree's needles with her hand. The feel of the pointy needles caused Iris to become cautious. Stepping backwards, she continued looking up at the tree. Meanwhile, Rene was shaking his head because of Iris's first outdoor experience. *'Amazing.'* Using the stick as a prop to stand, Iris also tried using it for balance, which even increased her walking pace. The image of this made Rene place his hands upon the top of his shaking head. *'Astonishing.'* As he watched, Iris used her stick to facilitate her backyard adventure.

Struggling to use one of Rene's shoes, Iris reached up with it and managed to open the washroom door handle. When the door swung open, it revealed Rene sitting on the toilet. The sight of this caused both of them to widen their eyes in shock.

'Iris...Iris, close the door!' Rene demanded. Not moving at all, Iris stared at Rene seated on the toilet. *'I'll be out soon. Iris, shut the door now.'* Answering him with a nod, she quickly shut the door. *'Opening doors now?'* he said in a hushed tone.

Sleeping in bed with ear plugs, Rene was awoken by the sound of Iris giggling. Slowly, he sat up in bed and viewed Iris playing with her stuffed animals. Letting out a sigh, Rene wiped his hands over his face, followed by taking out his ear plugs.

‘Still not sleeping.’

The following morning, Rene rolled over to find that Iris was not in her crib. Widening his eyes, Rene quickly lunged out of bed, takes out his ear plugs and immediately searched around.

‘Iris? Iris...Iris, where did you go? Iris?’ Barely but just, Iris could be heard giggling somewhere from out of Rene’s room, prompting him to spin around and face the opened doorway. From one side to the next, Iris passed by. Instantly, Rene ran out of the bedroom in order to catch up with her.

‘Iris!’

Via a thumb print scanner, Joe entered the hospital’s laboratory with a briefcase in hand.

In the nearly empty laboratory, Joe set down his briefcase onto a table, next to one of many computers. A few other co-workers were present however they were too busy to notice Joe. Once seated in front of the computer, he opened his briefcase. From it, Joe took out multiple DNA samples of Iris. Each sample was contained in miniature glass vials. One strand of hair, a saliva swab, a small blood sample and a single nail clipping.

Seated at the Auclair home kitchen table, Rene ate breakfast alone. Looking up, he soon realised he was alone and started checking his surroundings.

‘Iris?’ Rene called. ‘Iris...where did you go now?’ Right after Rene sighed, he was soon surprised by the sound of the toilet flushing. Arising onto his feet, Rene's eyebrows arose as well. Thereafter, Iris walked into the kitchen with a self satisfied smile. In due course, she came to a halt in front of Rene. ‘Did you just...go to the...’

‘Iris?’ Rene summoned when walking past his home office. ‘Iris!’ he called again. Returning to his office, Rene found her with a few books opened on the floor. Styled like the living room, his office is practically a personal library, with a fancy, cast iron ladder to reach the top shelves. ‘Iris, what are you...reading?’ Looking up, she was wearing a large smile.
