

## A Reality Reboot

I loved escaping to the warm sandy beaches of Mexico, a vacation from the judgemental people who stared at my odd-demeanor-that-you-couldn't-quite-place and their eyes boring into my soul. My teachers would describe me as a "passionate student with amazing report cards," while my fellow classmates would explain, "A nerdy, 15-year-old kid with a mop of red, curly hair." Yes, I knew I looked odd, but being smart was my fashion. I could hack into any firewall, software, or website and I could decode anything. This was my style, but sometimes I needed to escape.

As I dove into the ocean I entered a world of soundless blue. I let my body go limp to immerse into an escapeful reality, to then be jolted out of my trance, when I bumped into a dark floating object. Sputtering, I braced myself. Expecting to find a ratty old surfboard, instead, the odorous smell clogged my nostrils as I came face-to-face with a dead person...

His face was an unsettling spectacle—layers of torn skin delicately veiling the intricate web of internal arteries. A peculiar transformation was underway, his body was decaying leaving only a heavy stench, and a rotted body. But, there was one other question that nagged me. Why was he face up and his head floating above water? I recalled that lifeless bodies typically drifted face-down due to gas emissions, with the heavy skull pulling the head face down. The anomaly here lay in this body's defiance of this anatomical fact.

I needed to study this phenomenon in detail, so I carefully swam it ashore, fastened my towel around it, and tucked in the edges. My mom was upstairs taking a nap, but she never gave a second glance at anything I smuggled into the house since I started buying frozen frogs for dissection. Down the stairs I went, carefully maneuvering the body so as not to damage or break any of its delicate parts, to the basement. *This is my haven*, I thought as my eyes drank in the beakers with mysterious substances, shelves upon shelves of science books, and a single lab table in the midst of it all. The lights flickered to life as I slowly unfolded the towel and set the corpse on the table. It was all the more revolting as I stared, the light reflecting off the skull's facets and casting deep shadows that danced across the floor.

As I poked and prodded at it, diving past the mold and rotten skin into the blood, internal arteries, and bones, I found nothing unusual that would explain why the body was floating facing up. I dissected deeper into his face, already eroded by water, his yellow teeth were half chipped away and smoothed by the waves, while his nose was almost completely gone. Surprisingly, the eyes were completely intact, so I extracted them from the goopy mess in the skull and examined its interior. At surface level, the cornea was in good condition, but deeper into the layers of the iris, a reflective surface caught my attention.

Faintly, I could make out a gray netting camouflage to the iris. I grabbed my acutely fine tipped blade to handle it with precision. I slit the iris in half and revealed a tiny sensor and camera implanted inside! I was aghast with this discovery, and looked around to see if anyone was in the room. A deafening pitch of silence shrouded the room as a barrage of thoughts wracked my brain. *Are there cameras implanted in all of our eyes? Were they created to monitor our existence? Are we being controlled by these implants?* Suddenly, as my mind was reeling, the camera sprang to life and started to blink red repeatedly. *Oh gosh! This is not good, someone knows, someone is watching me right now, and they know I know!*

There was a knock at the door. *Nooo! Someone is coming for me, I know too much!* I finally talked some sense into myself and stumbled up the steps to answer the door.

"Hello?", I asked, to the unknown suspect behind the door. My heart was racing, and skipped a beat. My head pounded. Sweat dripped down my forehead.