



MY REALITY APP

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CHAPTER 4: A CRIME IN PARADISE



****Chapter 4: A CRIME iN pArAdiSe****

"The crime has no mystery. The system failed to classify the danger as such," the first inspector reported to William Davis, head of criminal investigations, as he stepped onto the meticulously maintained lawn of the crime scene. "The technicians have already pinpointed the problem and are working on a fix. We've apprehended the suspect who committed the crime."

William nodded but remained silent, his sharp gaze sweeping over the scene. He wasn't one to accept explanations at face value, especially when it came to a system as ingrained in society as the My Reality network. The inspector handed him a tablet containing the 3D footage of the event. William reviewed it, the projection rendering the scene in lifelike clarity before him.

He saw Steve approaching Allison, his body radiating fury, every step punctuated by shouted insults and threats. The kitchen knife in his hand gleamed, its deadly intent clear. Allison, on the other hand, appeared serene, almost unnervingly so. Her face showed no fear, no recognition of the danger bearing down on her. Instead, she smiled, radiating an almost surreal happiness as Steve plunged the knife into her abdomen.

Even as her life ebbed away, Allison's expression remained unchanged. It was a face that belonged in a moment of celebration, not one of brutal violence.



William replayed the footage, shifting perspectives to examine the broader scene. A couple of dozen cars had driven past the crime, their occupants oblivious. Several pedestrians had walked by as well, yet none had reacted. The system, the omnipresent guardian of society, had failed to register anything out of the ordinary. The murder unfolded in plain sight, unnoticed and unchecked.

This wasn't just a glitch. The system wasn't perfect—no technology was—and occasional hiccups were expected, especially after major updates. But this? This was unprecedented. The system had never failed so catastrophically to classify such a clear and present danger.

The My Reality system, bolstered by the compulsory integration of AR contact lenses, was society's sentinel. By monitoring vital signs—heartbeat, sweat levels, breathing patterns—the system's AI had learned to predict criminal intent with remarkable accuracy. Tension spikes correlated with aggression, fear, or anxiety, creating early warning signals that allowed authorities to intervene before a crime occurred. Crimes of passion or impulse occasionally slipped through, but premeditated acts were rare, caught by the system long before they could be carried out.

Then there were the outliers—those who lived outside the system's reach. Underground dwellers, hidden in the abandoned subway networks, had severed themselves from society entirely. They avoided the lenses, the New Internet, and the unyielding surveillance that came with them. But they didn't surface during daylight, let alone commit bold crimes in public.



This murder didn't fit either profile. It was premeditated, calculated, and both Steve and Allison were firmly within the system's tracking parameters. Every indicator said this crime shouldn't have happened.

Officially, the case could be closed as a one-off anomaly—a technical glitch, nothing more. But as William stared at the footage again, unease gnawed at him. Something felt off, a small but persistent itch in the back of his mind. He'd spent decades honing his instincts, and they were telling him there was more to this than a simple error in the system's code.

He closed the tablet and glanced around the scene once more. The pristine lawn, the red roses blooming vividly across the AR-rendered front yard, were no more, now a pool of blood was perfectly visible in its place. This wasn't just a failure of technology. It was something else.

And William Davis wasn't the type to let it go

William entered the stark interrogation room, where Steve sat waiting. The fluorescent lights buzzed faintly, casting a sterile glow over the walls. Steve had declined the presence of a lawyer, a decision that struck William as unusual but not unheard of. The man had already confessed, fully owning up to his actions.



Taking a seat across from him, William studied Steve. His face was calm, almost serene. There was none of the tension, fear, or defiance that usually accompanied a suspect in his position. If anything, Steve radiated a peculiar kind of peace, as though committing the crime had somehow brought him closure.

William began, his tone measured but probing. "Mr. Davis, I've been informed that you refused legal counsel. I've reviewed your records, and they paint a picture of a model citizen—volunteering for social causes, active in your community. Are you absolutely sure you don't want to reconsider the presence of a lawyer?"

Steve offered a faint smile. "Please, call me Steve. And no, there's no need. I understand the gravity of what I've done, and I accept the consequences."

William nodded, leaning forward slightly. "Alright, Steve. In your statement, you mentioned deciding to commit the crime early that morning. You described being under significant stress. Can you tell me what caused that stress?"

Steve's expression didn't waver as he replied, his tone calm but tinged with something deeper—resignation, perhaps. "Of course. The day before, I lost my wife and two sons in a car accident. They were on their way to see me at work. I had to stay late again, and Cathy—my wife—thought it'd be nice if they could bring me dinner and spend a few minutes together. On the way, a drunk truck driver ran a red light and crashed into their car. They were killed instantly."



William paused, his professional detachment slipping for a moment. "I'm deeply sorry for your loss."

Steve exhaled, his shoulders sinking slightly. "Thank you... but it doesn't matter now. It's over."

William shifted his gaze to the file in front of him, scanning the details. "You worked as a computer programmer at an advertising agency. Was working late a common occurrence for you?"

Steve's jaw tightened slightly, his calm demeanor cracking just enough to show a flicker of tension. "Yes... it was."

William pressed gently, understanding the weight of Steve's response. "Was this overtime connected to Allison Harrison? We know you both worked for the same company."

Steve flinched at the mention of Allison's name, a subtle reaction that didn't escape William's notice. "Yes," Steve admitted, his voice quieter now. "She was one of the account managers responsible for bringing in clients."

Elaborating, he continued, his tone laced with restrained bitterness. "She set deadlines that were... impossible. Unrealistic, even. For over a year, our department worked non-stop—nights, weekends, holidays—just to meet her targets. And it wasn't just the workload. There was always the unspoken threat hanging over us: if we failed, we'd be fired. She made that perfectly clear."



William leaned back slightly, his tone probing yet calm. "Did you ever try speaking to her about the situation?"

Steve let out a long, heavy sigh, his gaze dropping to the table. "We tried. Multiple times. But there was no talking to her. She used My Reality to filter everything. Every request for dialogue, every plea for more reasonable working conditions—it all vanished into the app, rephrased or ignored completely. She didn't even see us, not really. To her, we were just... smiling faces and compliant voices. And the CEO? He was useless. He gave her free rein to do whatever she wanted, no matter the cost to the rest of us."

William observed Steve carefully, noting the bitterness in his tone and the exhaustion etched into his features. There was more here than just anger—there was despair. Despair that had clearly festered for a long time, until it boiled over into something catastrophic.

For a moment, the room fell silent, the faint hum of the lights the only sound. William knew this case was far from as straightforward as it seemed. The system's failure, Steve's calm acceptance, the layers of systemic neglect—it all pointed to something larger, something that didn't sit right.



William nodded thoughtfully, his tone measured. "I understand..." He glanced at the report again, his eyes scanning for additional details. "Steve, the records indicate you're a programmer. Can you tell me what your area of expertise is?"

Steve cleared his throat, his voice steady despite the weight in the room. "I'm a specialist in multimedia and 3D software applications."

William tilted his head slightly, his gaze sharpening. "And if we investigate further, are we going to find anything... unusual? Perhaps something about hacking skills?"

Steve's reaction was immediate and defensive, his voice rising slightly. "What? No! No... my expertise is strictly in my field. The little time I had left outside of work... I just wanted to spend it with my family..." His voice cracked as the last word escaped him. "My family..."

Steve's composure began to unravel, the memory of his loss pulling him into a spiral of grief. Sensing this, William leaned forward, his voice soft but firm. "Steve, I'm truly sorry for what you've been through. I understand this is a lot, but I need your help tying up some loose ends. If you can do that for me, I'll make sure you have the space you need to grieve in peace."



Steve nodded, swallowing hard as he regained some semblance of focus. "What do you need?"

William's voice was calm but deliberate. "I need you to think back to the moment you decided to commit the crime. Did you notice anything strange about My Reality? Anything out of the ordinary—something that didn't seem right?"

Steve furrowed his brow, the question forcing him to revisit the fateful day. "Something weird? I don't know... I just snapped. I wasn't myself. I was out of control..." He paused, his expression tightening as if struggling to remember. "It was just... quiet."

William's curiosity deepened. "Quiet?"

Steve hesitated before continuing. "The day before, the system wouldn't stop. It kept pushing me to buy some stress-relief pills, nagging me with ads and alerts about my anxiety levels. But that morning... it didn't do any of that. No ads, no alerts. It was just... quiet."

William's suspicions, already simmering beneath the surface, began to solidify. Something about Steve's statement fit too neatly with the anomaly he'd seen at the crime scene. "I see," he replied evenly, his mind already racing with possibilities.



He straightened, closing the file in his hands. "As I promised, you'll be left undisturbed until the formal process begins. Considering your circumstances, Steve, I urge you to seek psychological help. You've chosen a dark path, but that doesn't mean there's no way forward. Even if it feels hopeless now, you deserve the chance to find some measure of peace."

Steve nodded weakly, his gaze fixed on the table. William stood and left the room, the sound of the door clicking shut echoing softly behind him.

For a long moment, the room was silent. Steve sat alone, staring at his hands, his breathing shallow. Then, like the breaking of a dam, the silence gave way to the quiet, anguished sound of tears—tears of pain, loss, and a regret that words couldn't express.

In the hallway, William's steps were purposeful. His instincts told him there was more to this case than a simple system glitch. The quiet Steve described wasn't just an oversight—it was a deliberate absence. And William wasn't the kind of man to let such a thing go unexamined.

William sat at his desk, his eyes fixed on the streams of data flowing across his screen. His position granted him privileged access to most of the security-related data within the My Reality system. He combed through the video footage and access logs tied to both Steve and Allison, scrutinizing every detail. Yet, nothing appeared suspicious. No unauthorized access. No tampering with the video feeds. If someone had meddled, they had covered their tracks expertly.



Next, he turned his attention to the so-called code error that the technicians claimed had caused the system failure. While William wasn't a programming expert, his years of experience had given him a working knowledge of the basics. Still, to involve an expert and request a deeper investigation, he needed more than assumptions—he needed something concrete.

The corporation behind My Reality, Reality Labs, was fiercely protective of its software. They guarded their systems as if revealing even the smallest flaw might shatter their reputation. William knew firsthand how difficult it was to access the data he currently had. Reality Labs would prefer the police worked with second-hand, filtered information, sanitized to the point of uselessness. But the pervasive atmosphere of fear in society—cultivated and reinforced by mass media—had forced the corporation to allow limited direct access to the system. Without this concession, investigations like William's would be impossible.

He traced Steve's emotional trajectory, starting with the tragic moment he received the news of his family's death. The system had recorded the expected tension spikes, triggering its usual responses. Everything, at first glance, appeared to function as designed. Over the following hours, Steve's tension plateaued at a constant but elevated level—again, not unusual given the circumstances.



The challenge was sifting through the sheer volume of processes triggered during that time. Each spike in tension had set off hundreds of personalized advertising and recommendation processes, all tailored specifically to Steve. This bespoke system of advertising—designed to target each individual's unique psychological profile—was almost impossible to decipher. It was like a DNA sequence, custom-built for every user. No two people had the same algorithm analyzing and selling to them. Comparing Steve's data to others yielded nothing useful.

Undeterred, William fast-forwarded to the morning of the crime. Steve had left his house at exactly 8:00 a.m., heading toward Allison's residence several streets away. William reviewed the video logs from Steve's journey. True to Steve's account, the morning had been eerily quiet. Not a single advertisement interrupted him—not even the usual barrage of product suggestions the system was known for.

This was unusual. The My Reality system ensured constant engagement unless users explicitly paid to reduce or eliminate ads. Steve's financial records confirmed that he hadn't opted for the ad-free experience. Based on his income level, Steve should have been receiving ads every ten minutes, at minimum.

Yet the logs showed two irrefutable facts:



1. Steve hadn't received any ads that morning, nor at any point during the day leading up to the crime.

2. He hadn't paid to disable ads.

William leaned back in his chair, his brow furrowed. On its own, this anomaly might not be enough to warrant a full-scale investigation. The corporation often rolled out experimental features or updates that broke parts of the system temporarily, leading to occasional glitches far more severe than this. To Reality Labs, a brief lapse in ad delivery would likely be dismissed as minor and irrelevant.

But this wasn't irrelevant. It was a potential clue—a piece of a larger puzzle. Something deliberate, perhaps. Or something more complex than a simple bug.

He stared at the screen, the weight of the decision pressing on him. This anomaly wasn't enough to shake the higher-ups into action, but it was something.

A thread to pull.

A possible pattern to uncover.