



MY REALITY APP

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CHAPTER 5: EARLY WAKE UP



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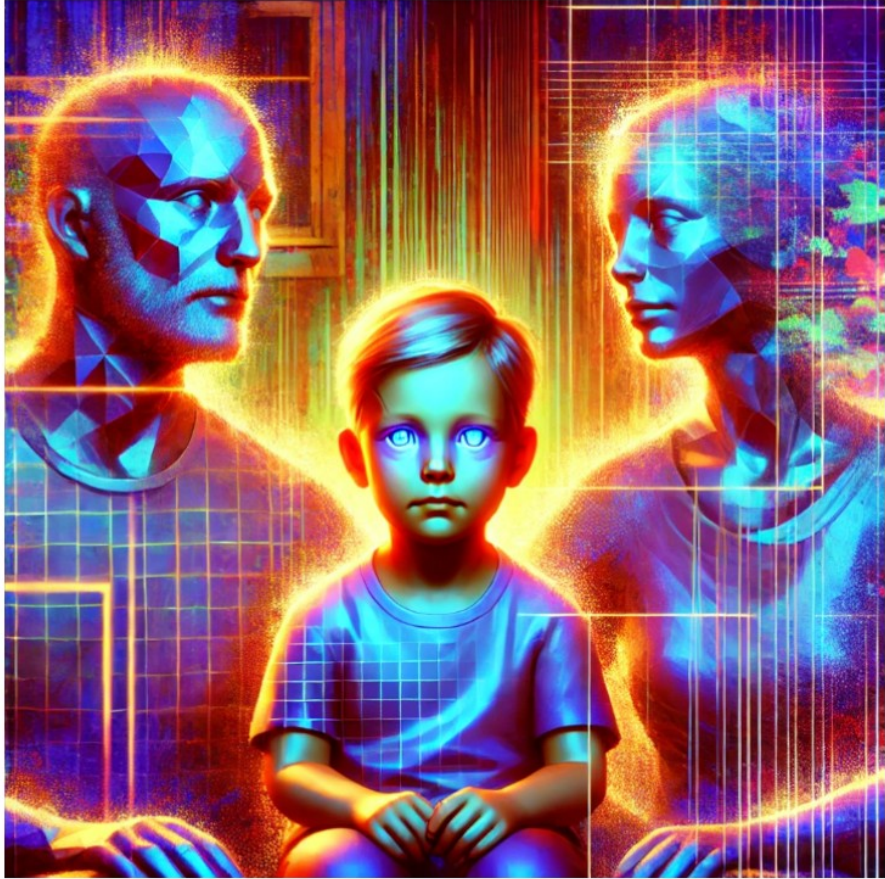
Luca was extraordinary. A one-in-a-generation anomaly.

In a world where every aspect of life was meticulously monitored and controlled, hacking the system from within required not just skill, but an almost incomprehensible brilliance. Luca had that brilliance—and he knew it.

The My Reality contact lenses were surgically implanted in every citizen at the tender age of five. The timing wasn't arbitrary; it was deliberate. By five, a child was just beginning to form a concrete understanding of the world around them. It was the perfect moment to overwrite that understanding, to replace reality with the state-approved illusion. Once the lenses were in, every action, every moment, would be monitored and recorded. Forever. Reality itself would become an algorithm, customized and sanitized, ensuring compliance and control.

That was the fate Luca refused to accept.

At just four years old, Luca understood something most adults couldn't grasp in a lifetime: the lenses were a prison. A life lived through them would never be free. His mind, sharper and more curious than those around him, began to notice the cracks in the façade. The smiles that never wavered. The happiness that seemed artificial. The endless, unspoken agreement to ignore the dissonance between the bright, colorful world people saw and the quiet misery that lay beneath.



It didn't take long for Luca to realize he couldn't trust his parents. To him, they seemed like drones—always smiling, always oblivious to their own oppression. It wasn't that they didn't love him. Luca never doubted their love. But it felt hollow, like a mechanical doll that spoke words of affection on command. His parents didn't see him. They saw what the system wanted them to see: the version of their child rendered by My Reality. They loved something that didn't truly exist.

It broke his heart.

Luca loved his parents with every fiber of his being. What he wanted more than anything was for them to see him as he really was—not the sanitized version, but the messy, imperfect, authentic Luca. He craved real love, the kind that came from genuine understanding. And though he could sense, deep beneath the layers of fake reality clouding their vision, a spark of true affection waiting to break free, it was buried too deep. Their smiles, their denial of the bleakness around them, their unshakable belief in the beauty of a world that didn't exist—it was unbearable.

Luca saw the world for what it truly was. He saw the filth that caked the streets, the ragged clothes barely holding together on people's backs, the unrelenting sickness that seemed to cling to every breath. He tasted the chemical-laden sludge that passed for food, its synthetic flavors masking the rot underneath. And everywhere he turned, he saw the same thing: blank, mindless smiles. Everyone—his parents included—wore that vacant expression, as if the AR lenses had erased the misery from their minds entirely. To them, everything was perfect.



Luca refused to swallow that pill.

At just four years old, he was powerless to change his fate directly. He understood that. The system was vast, omnipresent, and relentless. He knew of the underground—the shadowy subculture of people who had slipped free from the system's grasp and lived in forgotten places, disconnected from the grid. He admired their defiance, but to go underground meant giving up any chance of fighting back. It was his last resort.

What Luca needed wasn't escape; it was knowledge. Not the sanitized, corporate-approved version fed through the New Internet, but the raw, unfiltered truths of the world. He needed access to the old Internet.

Convincing his parents to buy him a computer wasn't difficult. He framed it as curiosity, a desire to explore and learn, and they happily indulged him. What they purchased was a basic model, designed primarily for accessing the beta prototypes of corporate software. It allowed limited access to the old Internet, but the operating system was tightly locked down, restricting flexibility. For most users, it was a dead end.

But Luca wasn't like most users.



Through careful experimentation, Luca discovered that the machine still had backdoors—leftovers from the rushed transition between the old Internet and the New Internet. These overlooked vulnerabilities allowed him to bypass the restrictions, granting him access to something far more valuable: a stealthy, underlying network hidden beneath the corporations' noses.

It was brilliant, Luca thought, marveling at the ingenuity of its creators. The underground had found a way to exploit the very systems designed to control them. They piggybacked on the corporate-approved video streams, embedding their communications within them. The technique took advantage of an old method from the early days of the Internet, one that prioritized speed over data integrity. By subtly altering a few bytes of a video stream—barely a fraction of a megabyte—they could transmit encrypted messages without compromising the video's quality.

The corporations, obsessed with optimizing user engagement, hadn't bothered to verify the integrity of the data packets. To them, if the video looked perfect, it was perfect. That oversight allowed the underground network to exist, riding unnoticed on the backs of toxic corporate propaganda streams.

Once Luca accessed this hidden network, an entire world opened before him. He discovered an underground society that had managed to carve out a fragile existence outside the system's control. They had built isolated, autonomous outposts across the cities, the only places where people could see reality as it truly was.



The network served as their lifeline. Through it, they coordinated the transportation of food and medicine between outposts, avoiding detection by the authorities. They shared alerts about incoming police raids, giving their people a chance to scatter before the crackdowns arrived. Every byte of information was precious, carried in the shadows of corporate video streams that otherwise sought to enslave minds.

To Luca, it was a revelation. The underground wasn't just surviving—they were fighting back.

Luca knew he had to take a leap. A risk so enormous it bordered on the unimaginable for someone his age. If he wanted to uncover more about the technology slated to imprison him—the lenses they would implant in just a year—he needed more than what his restricted device could provide. He needed real answers. And to get those, he had to contact the underground.

His first challenge was figuring out when and where a delivery would take place. After days of painstaking observation and piecing together fragmented information from the hidden network, he pinpointed a time and location.

At 2:00 a.m., Luca slipped out of his room. The streets in his part of the city were eerily quiet, as they always were at that hour. Anyone awake was either lost in the addictive experiences piped directly into their eyes by My Reality or confined to their apartments. In this neglected corner of the city, there was no police presence to speak of. The authorities had long since stopped patrolling these streets. Why bother when the system monitored everything? The police only appeared after the fact, to clean up the dead or detain those who had already been caught.



Luca made his way to the meeting point, his heart pounding with every step. He found a spot behind a cluster of overflowing trash containers, crouching low and trying to steady his breathing. But Luca, despite his brilliance, was no master of stealth. His nerves were raw, and his every movement betrayed his inexperience.

Just as the meeting was about to begin, a voice broke through the silence behind him. Low and calm, yet firm.

"Who the heck are you?"

Luca's heart stopped. Panic surged through him, and without thinking, he bolted from his hiding spot. But he didn't get far. A strong hand grabbed him effortlessly, lifting him off the ground like a feather. He struggled violently, thrashing and kicking, even biting the hand that held him. It was no use.

The man holding him laughed softly, amused by the boy's futile resistance. "Ha ha ha! This one's got some fire," he murmured, the hint of a smile in his voice.

Luca's strength gave out quickly. He was just a child, his small body no match for the grown man's solid grip. When the man saw the boy's energy had drained, he loosened his hold and gently set him down on the ground. Luca stood there, chest heaving, his mind racing with what to do next. Running was pointless. He wouldn't make it far.



After a long pause, the man spoke again, his tone calmer now. "Alright, young warrior," he said, crouching slightly to meet Luca's eyes. "Are you going to tell me what you're doing here, or do we need to start over?"

Luca hesitated. He knew he had no choice but to tell the truth. He'd been caught red-handed at their meeting point, and these people—the ones disconnected from the system—weren't fools. He wouldn't be able to outwit them.

"I... I wanted to know you," he said quietly, his voice barely above a whisper.

The man raised an eyebrow, clearly intrigued. "Oh?" he said, his curiosity piqued. "And why would you want to know us?"

Luca swallowed hard, then took a deep breath. His words came out steady, but tinged with vulnerability, pointing outside with his little finger. "Because I don't want to be like them."

The man who had caught Luca was none other than Henry Walker, the leader of the underground network in the city. Henry's reputation preceded him—a man of quiet resolve and sharp instincts, trusted by the scattered remnants of the free world to keep their fragile network alive.



As the night stretched on, Luca found himself doing something he had never done before: trusting someone fully. He told Henry everything. How he had hacked his basic computer, found the secret communication system buried within the corporate video streams, and uncovered the details of this clandestine meeting. His voice wavered as he confessed his fears—how terrified he was of becoming like everyone else outside the underground, their minds clouded by the My Reality system. But he also spoke of his parents, the love he still held for them, and the guilt that gnawed at him at the thought of leaving them behind.

Henry listened intently, his silence encouraging Luca to keep going. When the boy finally stopped, his chest heaving slightly from the effort of letting it all out, Henry took a moment to gather his thoughts. The room felt still, the weight of Luca's story settling between them.

"Luca," Henry began, his voice steady, "do you realize what you've done?" He paused, letting his words sink in. "You are the first person—ever—to discover our communication system. For thirty years, since we first put it in place, no one outside our underground outposts has figured it out. Not once. Even when some of our people were captured, tortured, and killed, they never revealed this secret."



He exhaled deeply, his eyes meeting Luca's. "When you told me you knew about it, I had to fight the panic rising in my chest. I thought we were compromised. But then I heard your full story." Henry paused, a small, almost incredulous smile tugging at the corner of his lips. "I'm glad I listened. Luca, you're one of us."

Luca blinked, unsure how to respond. The weight of Henry's words filled the room, and for the first time in a long while, he felt something like belonging.

Henry stood and moved to the stove, the small flame flickering as he poured hot water into two mismatched mugs. The scent of herbs filled the air as he handed one to Luca, who accepted it with a quiet, grateful nod.

"But you're not like the rest of us," Henry continued, his voice steady but filled with conviction. "Honestly, I don't think there's anyone like you in the entire world. The fact that, at just four years old, with no help, you've managed to get this far—it's extraordinary. Luca, you are extraordinary."

Luca looked down at his mug, the warmth seeping into his hands. His face flushed slightly, but his voice was clear when he finally spoke. "So, will you help me?"



Henry didn't hesitate. He set his mug down and leaned forward slightly, his expression softening with something that resembled pride. "Yes, Luca," he said, his tone deliberate and steady. "I'll help you with whatever you need."

In the year leading up to the implantation of the My Reality contact lenses, Luca spent every night slipping through the shadows to visit the underground community. By day, he lived under the watchful eyes of a world that never saw him as he truly was. By night, he immersed himself in the only place where reality existed unfiltered.

The conditions in the underground were undeniably harsh—scarce food, limited resources, and constant vigilance against discovery. But here, at least, people had something rare and precious: control over their lives. In the dim light of the outposts, Luca saw what he'd longed for his entire life. He saw love. Real love. Families who, despite their hardships, shared an unbreakable bond. Parents who looked at their children and truly saw them, their gazes unclouded by the AR filters that reduced everyone else to lifeless smiles.

Every time Luca witnessed these moments, it brought a sharp pain to his chest. A reminder of what he yearned for, and of the parents he loved but who could never see him for who he was. But Luca didn't let the pain consume him. Instead, he channeled it, transforming it into determination. If he worked hard enough, maybe—just maybe—he could find a way to free his parents from the beautiful nightmare they lived in.



Henry kept his word, providing everything Luca asked for. And when Henry didn't have what was needed, he reached out to other outposts, often at great personal risk, to bring it back. In the short time they'd known each other, Henry had become more than a mentor—he was a father figure. Through quiet conversations with other members of the underground, Luca learned of Henry's sacrifices and the burdens he carried to keep the outposts alive.

Years earlier, when a corporate raid had threatened to dismantle the network, Henry had allowed himself to be captured to save others. For a year, he endured brutal interrogations in the corporate-controlled police headquarters. They beat him, starved him, and subjected him to unspeakable tortures, but Henry refused to break. When his captors finally believed him dead after a savage beating, they dumped his broken body near a known gathering area for the outposts, intending to demoralize the community by displaying one of their own as a lifeless warning.

What they didn't know was that Henry was still alive. Barely. His rescue was a miracle, but the toll it had taken on him was evident. It took nearly a year for him to recover, and even then, he was forever changed. The trauma had claimed the sight in one eye, and his right leg had been replaced with a rudimentary prosthetic. Yet Henry never let his injuries define him. He returned to his leadership role stronger than ever, a symbol of resilience and hope for the underground.



Henry's strength wasn't just physical; it was his humility and determination that made him a true leader. He wasn't afraid to ask for help, and he inspired loyalty not through fear, but through trust. Henry was there for his people, and they, in turn, would do anything for him.

Luca absorbed these stories, each one solidifying his admiration for Henry. In the underground, surrounded by people who lived in the harshest conditions but still chose freedom over illusion, Luca found a purpose greater than himself. He wasn't just working to free his parents—he was fighting for a world where no one would have to live behind a mask.

And as Henry's unwavering support fueled his determination, Luca knew one thing with certainty: he wasn't alone anymore.

Once Luca acquired a laptop capable of seamlessly bridging the old Internet and the New Internet, his progress accelerated dramatically. The device was a rare find, a relic in itself, and yet it provided the exact flexibility Luca needed. His first major breakthrough came when he managed to obtain the schematics for the My Reality contact lens implants, along with the BIOS system that governed their most essential hardware functions.



The BIOS—Basic Input and Output System—was a relic of an earlier technological age, often overlooked amidst the sleekness of modern interfaces. But for Luca, it was a treasure trove of potential. Nestled deep within the circuitry, the BIOS acted as the silent architect of the hardware's soul, controlling the foundational processes that allowed the device to function. Unlike software that left footprints in logs or firmware updates that raised immediate red flags, modifications to the BIOS were stealthier, virtually invisible except to the most exhaustive audits.

It didn't take long for Luca to unravel the intricate workings of the system. In just a few days, he had reverse-engineered its vulnerabilities, crafting a custom script capable of exploiting them. His goal was ambitious yet precise: to create a video loop capturing the last five minutes of activity. This loop could be triggered on command, feeding the system a seamless stream of fabricated input that mimicked real-time activity. With this, Luca could perform actions hidden from the prying eyes of the My Reality algorithms.

But while his script was brilliant in theory, implementing it presented a monumental challenge. Testing the hack required activating a real pair of contact lenses. The underground had managed to salvage several pairs from the bodies of those who had died on the streets, victims of the system's failures or its brutal enforcement. Yet, turning them on posed an extreme risk.



The contact lenses were equipped with an unforgiving security protocol. Any activation outside of their authorized users triggered an immediate military-grade response. Within five minutes of powering on a stolen device, a military police squad would be deployed to the location of activation, armed and authorized to neutralize any threat.

It was a gamble, and everyone in the outpost knew it. Testing Luca's hack meant exposing themselves to the full force of the system's wrath. But it was a gamble they had to take. Even the most exceptional work rarely succeeded on the first attempt without real-world testing.

Henry, ever the voice of reason, gathered the team to discuss the risks. "We can't let fear stop us," he said, his one good eye scanning the faces of those around him. "What Luca has built could be the key to something bigger than any one of us. But we have to be smart. If we test this, it has to be quick, precise, and with an immediate plan to relocate if it goes wrong."

Luca, sitting at the edge of the room, felt the weight of their trust pressing on his young shoulders. He understood the stakes better than anyone. His mind raced as he recalculated every line of code, every variable, ensuring there were no errors. This wasn't just a test of his ingenuity—it was a test of their faith in him.



As the group finalized their plan, the tension was palpable. They were about to provoke the system that ruled their lives with an iron grip, and the margin for error was nonexistent.

But Luca didn't flinch. He had come too far to let fear dictate his actions now.

Henry, Luca, and two other members of the outpost carefully made their way to an abandoned industrial zone on the outskirts of the city. The area was a decaying labyrinth, its skeletal buildings long forgotten by the rest of society. Rusted machinery and crumbling walls littered the landscape, giving the place an air of silent menace. Even those disconnected from the system avoided it, wary of the chemical residues that still lingered, remnants of a bygone era of manufacturing excess.

But for this test, it was the perfect location. The dangerous terrain and maze-like layout offered potential escape routes if things went wrong. The disrepair of the buildings, with walls on the verge of collapse, might slow down any pursuit. It wasn't the first time Henry and his team had been here; they knew the area intimately, including every shortcut and hiding spot.



At 3:00 a.m., the group reached the chosen building, its roof partially caved in and the air thick with the metallic tang of rust. They worked quickly, setting up in the building's main hall. Luca's laptop glowed faintly in the darkness, the only source of light other than their handheld torches. He had everything prepared to wirelessly connect to the My Reality contact lenses the moment they were powered on.

The stakes were clear: once the testing began, the military police would arrive within five minutes. To verify that Luca's hack had succeeded, they would need to wait an agonizingly long minute to confirm the result. If the test failed, they would have to repeat the process, leaving them with almost no margin for error.

Henry stood beside Luca, holding the contact lenses in his scarred hand. His one good eye darted between the boy and the surroundings, his focus unwavering. The other two members of the team—wiry and alert—were stationed at opposite ends of the building, watching for any signs of danger. Every creak, every faint gust of wind, set their nerves on edge.

Luca's hands hovered over the keyboard, trembling slightly as he adjusted the final parameters. His heart pounded in his chest, but his resolve was unshaken. This was what he'd been working toward, the culmination of months of preparation. He inhaled deeply, willing the fear to loosen its grip on him.



"It's time," he said, his voice steady despite the tension coiled inside him. He looked at Henry and gave a small nod. "Now."

Henry didn't hesitate. With a practiced motion, he powered on the contact lenses.

The small device blinked to life, its circuits humming faintly as it connected to the New Internet. Luca's laptop sprang into action, streams of data flooding the screen as the system attempted to authenticate the stolen hardware.

The countdown began.

The moment Luca detected the contact lenses on the wireless network he had set up, he connected, uploaded his script, and ran it. The entire process took just 20 seconds. Now, all they could do was wait for one minute to see the results.

But waiting wasn't in Luca's nature. He had prepared backup scripts for this very scenario. If the first test failed, he was ready to try again immediately.

01:20. The first test failed.

The error logs Luca had pre-programmed the script to collect appeared on his laptop. His fingers moved swiftly as he scanned the data, searching for the problem. He signaled Henry to power-cycle the device. They had to try the next script without delay.



01:50. The second test began.

As the new script executed, Luca dove into the logs from the first test, dissecting the entries for clues. His sharp eyes narrowed as he found something unexpected: an entry for an invalid memory address. By the schematics, that code block corresponded to a routine verification of the universal time via the New Internet. It was supposed to be a simple read operation.

Unless...

A creeping suspicion took root in Luca's mind.

02:50. The second test failed.

The tension in the room grew palpable. The other two members of the outpost exchanged nervous glances, their fear mounting with each passing second. Even Henry, steady as ever, showed cracks in his resolve. But Luca didn't have time to explain his theory. He was already typing furiously, patching a solution to what he believed was the problem.

04:00. Luca stopped the third test himself, instructing Henry to power-cycle the device once more.

04:20. The fourth test began.



It was then that they heard the unmistakable sound of rotor blades cutting through the night air. The military police chopper was closing in. They were out of time.

Henry barked out orders. The team immediately pivoted to their escape plan, moving quickly through the rubble-strewn labyrinth of abandoned buildings. But with the device still powered on, the chopper would home in on their signal. Improvisation was their only option.

Henry scooped Luca into his arms, while another team member grabbed Luca's laptop. They sprinted through the dark, weaving through collapsing walls and rusted machinery as the chopper loomed ever closer. The spotlight swept the ground, missing them by mere feet.

05:20. On Luca's laptop screen, the black terminal displayed a single word in bright green letters: SUCCESS.

Henry didn't hesitate. He handed Luca to one of the others and grabbed the contact lenses. Without a word, he bolted in the opposite direction, the device clutched tightly in his hand. The chopper's spotlight veered, locking onto him. He didn't look back.

The rest of the team, carrying Luca and his laptop, slipped away into the shadows. Thanks to Henry's sacrifice, they managed to leave the area undetected.



The hours that followed back at the underground outpost were the longest of Luca's young life. Every second dragged, his mind racing with horrific scenarios of what might have become of Henry. The man who had risked everything for them could be dead, captured, or worse. The thought was unbearable.

And then, just as despair began to set in, Henry walked into the outpost. He was smiling as if he'd simply gone for a leisurely stroll.

Luca ran to him, tears streaming down his face, and threw his arms around him with all the strength he could muster. It was the happiest moment of his life, relief pouring out of him in sobs of joy. Henry, his steady presence as unshakable as ever, patted Luca's back gently, his smile never fading.

When the emotions finally settled, and Luca had wiped his tear-streaked face, Henry asked, "So, kid, what was the problem?"

Luca grinned through the remnants of his tears, his sharp mind already miles ahead. "The code wasn't actually checking the time on the Internet. They just used a dirty shortcut—and never bothered to fix it."