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Watched

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Author Bio

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Watched

NATALIE M. DOLAN

He awoke with a jolt, but that was nothing new. His mind had taken to startling him from sleep, although he thought that by now it should have adjusted to the feeling of being watched. It was constant, after all; the Big Eye in the Sky never blinked. Through the semidarkness, he could just make out the far corner of his room, where he knew a miniscule camera captured his every move, a microphone caught his every word.

He couldn't see them, of course—that would defeat the purpose entirely. Some bugging that would be! Then everyone would know, everyone would believe, foolish beings that they were, trusting only what they could see. As it was, the precious few people with whom he had shared his discovery had given only a slow nod or a noncommittal *huh* or, best of all, a *Do you really think they would be watching you?*

He laughed into the silence, cherishing his derision.

Of course they would be watching him. Why wouldn't they? They had to keep tabs on all their precious little social experiments. *Let's watch the people run around, watch them bump into each other and crash into walls, let's see what they do.* Why else would humans, extremely selfish beings that they were, set up governments that offered support and security to millions of strangers? Why would humans, if not funneled deliberately into each other's lives, deign to work together to build a society for the common good? No, human beings were not so kind.

But *him*, oh, he was sure he was specialty viewing now, a primetime slot at Big Eye in the Sky Productions. Because he knew, knew the truth, and now *they* knew that he knew, which had been confirmed for him just yesterday. Or was it earlier today? A dark curtain covered his window, hiding from him any inkling of the time.

Well, whenever it was now, it had been late morning when he had presented his boss with the biggest story she'd ever see: the truth about the government's surveillance. He'd thrown everything down on the editor-in-chief's desk—all his evidence, his observations, scraps of overheard conversations, confidential sources. And what had she said? "You sound like another conspiracy theorist. Confidential sources? Personal accounts?"

No one will buy that. Stick to reporting real news.”

A *conspiracy theorist*? He had uncovered a massive system of oppression under the guise of free will, and his boss had lumped him in with the flat-Earthers? After all the work he had put in, hours of unpaid overtime, all in the name of truth. In the name of freedom, real freedom, not the façade that they lived in. Clumsily crafted propaganda, and the public swallowed it hook, line, and sinker. Including his boss, it seemed.

So he'd quit.

And how happy he'd felt, how free, even knowing it was all a fabrication! Walking out the doors of the office building into the bright sunshine diluted by ever-present city smog, a box of his belongings in his arms, grinning widely—*too widely, perhaps, because a woman passing by with red hair and a pink jumpsuit stared a second too long, uncertainty–discomfort–fear morphing her face, then hurried along, surely, he thought, to report him and his knowledge of the system's true dealings—she was a spy, of course she was, they had known he was onto them, and they couldn't have a glitch in their precious little social experiment, oh no—but he couldn't have a glitch in his discovery, either, couldn't risk failure at the task he faced, the one that only he could complete because only he knew the magnitude of it: hadn't his boss as good as told him, when she told him to drop it, that he was correct—her insistence that no one would believe him was a desperate cover-up for the truth, that SOMEONE would believe him, because humans, mindless lemmings that they were, would believe anything they were told—his boss was in on it, of course she was, he saw that now, and she must have alerted her superiors about the breach, and now he would be captured and silenced if he did not act quickly, act now, run after the woman, she mustn't stop him, he mustn't fail.*

All at once he'd found himself chasing after the woman, weaving through passersby who turned to stare after him. Her hair and outfit were a beacon across the crowded sidewalk; she was still walking at her brisk but steady pace, unaware of his quick approach. She had just begun to turn at the startled cries from scattered pedestrians when he tackled her to the ground.

Then, a blur of shouts, wrestling, arms restraining him, and a sudden darkness. Some sort of tranquilizer, he assumed, and during his unconsciousness they had brought him ... where? His apartment, he had thought, but now he glanced around and saw that these were not his walls, not his bed, not his room. Or were they? The men who had sedated him, brainwashed lackeys that they were, had surely taken him home, where they could observe his every move from a safe distance. Had they installed

the fluorescent lights whose outlines he saw through the dimness, tied these straps that bound his arms to the bed? He laughed because they weren't necessary. He wasn't going anywhere. He knew that, and they knew that.

That was alright. He would wait. He would wait and hear their explanations and smile when finally their lies unraveled at his feet.