

3. A MINING DISASTER

Why didn't he just divorce her? He didn't have to kill her!

–Where do you find about these stories.

–He had so much charm, he could have charmed the world.

–Sounds like a snake to me!

–You don't have family?

–None to speak of. It's better that way. You don't have anyone to share information with. That's what we're here for. To protect information.

I am listening very closely. I want to learn everything that I can. I need this job. Everyone around me is a woman. There is a very strange energy here. We are all submitting to our master.

–Think about him like a zen master.

–What do you mean?

–He gives these orders. And it's almost mystical just obeying.

–Whatever you say.

We are being trained each in front of a computer screen. We are in our individual modules, but we are all being monitored by our trainer.

–Even the training is part of the job. You are already engaging the monitoring that we do here. You are projecting an image from the mind on the world.

–It really does sound mystical.

The whole process has an air of telepathy to it. How is this possible?

–There is simply so much information that is available to you. Emails, cell phone conversations, mail... We even have access to wiretap tapes. The only way to sort through all of this is to have a map. We help you put together that map. It's just like a picture of your personality. That is what you are doing. Developing a map of personality to sift through all this information.

>>We have devised a host of algorithms that help organize it all. Computer programs that zero in on particular words and phrases that reveal the personality. The hard stuff is accomplished with these numbers and formula. All you have to do is to learn how to follow up. You are in charge. You have direct access to all available documents. You are the final arbiter. It is your judgement call.

What kind of power are we being given? I listen closely. I am trying to take it all in. He is acting as if all this is automatic. That's all we have to do is reach deep into ourselves to discover the organizing principle. If it's all that easy, then I should just give in to the idea.

I wonder about rights to privacy. Warrants. They've already figured out that kind of thing. We are dealing with enemies of the state. People who have flagrantly ignored the rule of law. What kind of rights do they deserve to protection.

–The President has authorized our operations. These are duties that you are to take seriously. We understand that you may have doubt about what we do here. All of this is legal an above board. In every case, we have authorization to look at this material. You should have no doubts that we take this responsibility very seriously. We do our utmost to safeguard the privacy

of every citizen of this great nation.

>>At any time, you may have questions about what you are doing. Any particular task may raise grave questions about the legality of our operations. It is your job to put these fears to rest. You are meeting a very specific need for our society. Without your input, we could not protect the freedoms that so many people take for granted. Once you have followed procedure, you should have no doubts about the above-board nature of our organization.

I knew that someone would eventually find me. You are the witness to what is happening to me. I hope that you can save me from further indignity, and, in the process, make things better for others in my position.

You may wonder how I recognized that you are monitoring my communication. In the present political climate, one has to be a naif to think that we are not being watched, all of us. More particularly in my case, I have tracked my stalker. I have discovered how the state does its utmost to observe my actions.

I don't think of myself as much of a rebel. To the contrary, my life is rather conventional. I am an engineer. I work in a non-defense related industry. There is really nothing in my work that is a matter of national security.

I go to work. And I come home. I barely have a political profile to speak of. I vote. But I am not a member of any political group. I am not a protestor. I don't take part in demonstrations.

I am intelligent. I ask questions. I am a curious guy. And the internet has provided me with the avenue to satisfy my curiosity. This is the weirdest part about all this. I have come to understand how you use information to determine who is and who is not a threat to the state. The idea is really so simple. I could easily explain it to a child.

Occasionally, it will be a particular email that rises to a level of suspicion. A word, a phrase, is enough to get the turbines turning. And all these combined phrases lead inexorably to the foregone conclusion. Of course, it may take a while for such a preponderance of evidence to form. But when it does, the alarm goes off.

When I first understood that we were all being watched, I worked to create my own formula to observe other people's communication. I applied this method through painstaking reflection. It was really like working through a good crossword puzzle.

To really do the job, I needed to bring a finer level of sophistication to the task. I honed the method until voila: it all made sense to me. I didn't stop there.

I save all my email. For work and all that. I pored through all of these emails. True to form, I reached the expected threshold. From that point on, I had no doubts whatsoever. I knew that I was being watched.

I came to understand the inherent flaws in any sort of program that is used to monitor communication. So much random drivel becomes mixed in with pertinent communication. There has to be an army of human being assigned to interpret this information. I finally recognized that I would find you on the other end of the line. I knew that you would come upon this message, my warning to the nation.

I have to admit that you have already submitted to the perversity that drives this mass violation of our fundamental rights. Why would you ever question the organization of which you are a part. I know that you have had your doubts. Unlike me, you may be the rebel. And

necessity has forced you to accept the authority that you once questioned. More than ever, you question my resistance. I am the very proof that none of this will ever succeed. Not while there are citizens who still cling to their freedom.

There is so much that is still unknown in these programs. And the citizen is being infringed on by unauthorized snooping. There remains a political urgency that permits such transgressions. In your zeal, you have signed up for this program. You may be impossible to stop. You are on a mission.

I have reluctantly accepted my own mission. In this, I make my appeal to you.

For a while, I continue to believe that I have simply imagined this email. It would certainly absolve me of the need to follow up. Besides, the risk seems too great. If they found out, I would certainly lose my job. And I could get arrested.

I understand that I am involved in a self-defining operation. Those who we monitor demand our attention. Their activities warrant our surveillance. Since we take the time to watch what they do, they must of nature be criminal. The argument is completely circular. But it makes sense. To question the method would mean that I am wondering about the legality of the operation in general. But I have already accepted its very legitimacy. I work on. If someone is really trying to contact me, there has to be some reason that is itself in violation of the rules of protocol. Since I have accepted these rules, my contact has to be involved in suspicious activities. He is trying to throw me off the trail even before I engage my research. I can't let myself be distracted.

I request a meeting with my supervisor.

–There hasn't been an interruption in the grid.

I am staring out the window as I talk to him.

–We have algorithms that would check for irregularities. Everything seems in working order.

–Could there be reasons for false positives?

–You haven't reported any problems. Why are you asking?

–I've just had suspicions. I guess I have my doubts about the infallibility of the system.

–That's not really part of your responsibility. I'm glad that you are so concerned. But you have nothing to worry about.

I keep wondering if the system can generate its own emails.

I decide to write him an email. I create a new email account that he cannot trace. One that they cannot trace at work. And I log on to a computer at the library.

I read your personal ad. I thought that you very honest in your message. Few of us like to admit that we're lonely. But that is the reason that I am replying to you. It's not like I'm some kind of freak. I like to think that I am a normal person. Guys approach me all the time. And I do try to maintain a social life. I have to admit that it is hard due to the fact that I work so much. But I try.

I just never seem to meet a quality guy. I'm sure you know what I'm talking about. In your ad, you described how creative you are. You talked about going to the symphony and seeing plays. I'm looking for someone like you.

A few days later I receive a reply.

Thank you for answering my ad. No one answered my ad with such an understanding of what I am going through. The only strange thing is how did you get my personal email.

He is calling my bluff.

I need to be more clever in this regard. If he is going to set up a personal, he is going to go through some service. A social networking site or the classifieds of a local newspaper. I could reply to him as is. Or I could start over again.

What if he set up his email primarily to make contact with him. Then I have shown my hand. I need to back off and rethink my strategy.

I check my other email address every few days to see if there has been any other follow up.

After about a week, there is another email.

I haven't heard back from you. Perhaps, I was too abrupt in my reply. I thought that I spelled things out in my ad. Maybe not. You sound like a lovely girl. Maybe we should meet.

I decide to trace the email address. This seems to be the safest option so I can protect myself. It appears to be a bizarre coincidence that the owner of the address works in our office.

–Is there anything strange going on with Terry Hall?

My supervisor wonders why I am asking questions.

–What's this about?

–He's just said some weird things to me.

–We could launch an investigation.

–It's not that serious. Maybe job stress.

–I'll call him in for a general review. I'll get back to you if I think that there is anything that is troubling.

Terry Hall is in his office that afternoon. It seems to be a very cordial meeting. Nothing suspicious whatsoever. I plan to do my own investigation.

–We keep running into each other. I don't even know your name. Mine's April.

–I'm Terry.

–Do you want to grab some lunch?

I've pulled him from his isolation; I've given him a purpose.

I probe him with questions. But he doesn't seem to know the difference. He is a total company man. A nice guy. But completely lacking in imagination.

There is no way that he could have been the source of the original note, much less the emails. My mouse is a lot more clever than I realized.

This is going to be a lot more difficult than I thought. My immediate guess is that my supervisor is behind this. He has been selected for his psychological acumen. He has us all on tenterhooks while doing his best not to let us break down completely. It would be just like him to try and mess with me. If he's this good, then it's going to be hard to make him reveal himself. And I can't let myself become too vulnerable. I have already taken the bait. And I have been

identified. I feel like a sitting duck waiting for the hunter to take pot shots at me.

Cleverness demands a clear plan of action. I thought that I was using my intelligence. But things have already become out of hand. I need to draw him out. Lure him into my trap.

What can I do to get my supervisor to reveal himself. I can't very well try to break into his email. I need to exploit my vulnerability. I talk to him about the Terry Hall experience.

–Thanks, for talking with him.

–No problem. He hasn't said anything more to you.

–He has given me these looks.

–We could transfer him to another section.

–No, I just have to live with him. There isn't any reason that might make him a little off.

–What are you asking?

–You're not giving him more work, are you?

–Nothing unusual. He's involved in some advanced technical analysis. I can't go into too much more detail.

–I wasn't really asking that.

–Is everything OK with you.

–What do you mean?

–The job.. Everything's going smoothly.

–Really well.

–Maybe this isn't the best place to talk about. We could get together for lunch.

–Are you asking me out for lunch?

–Not at all. I just thought that we could meet in a more casual setting. I could bring Jane along if you like.

–The psychologist.

–I want you to feel comfortable.

This doesn't seem to be going well. I can't let him run circles around me. I should have just accepted the lunch invitation without raising more questions.

–Tomorrow is fine.

–Let me put it into my Blackberry. Tomorrow it is.

When we arrive at the restaurant, I am agitated.

–Did you see a ghost?

–No, that guy over there is my ex.

–Him?

–No, the one who just went out the door. You can't see him now.

–Oh. How long has it been?

–Six months. That may seem to be quite a while for me to still be so jumpy. But it was a messy break up.

–I've had some problems at home with my wife. But we went to counseling. It's been a rough road back.

–What was it? Not another woman?

I am pushing back.

–No. Nothing like that. She had health problems. And I was working late hours. Part of my promotion.

He is telling me quite a bit about himself.

–Everything is fine now.

–I still have the late hours. But we have been talking through things more. And I try to make time for her.

–You have kids.

–No. It's the careers.

Is he performing well? All by the book. Even if he has been more open than usual. I am trying to detect signs of his deeper interest in me. He is playing the role of a concerned mentor. And it stopping at that.

–So, April, is everything making sense?

We talk on more. Nothing more to throw me off guard.

I hate to insult the abilities of my supervisor. But there is no way that he came up with a plan to entrap me. I don't want to seem over-confident. He's just out of his league. That doesn't mean that there isn't someone else at the agency who is playing a game with me. Since I have no other evidence, I am going to have to do a lot more if I hope to bring out my nemesis.

Did he show you a picture of his kids?

He doesn't have any children. He knows that. He is really messing with me.

He doesn't even have a wife?

Two messages in two days. I am still going to the library to make contact. It's not as if he can't trace me back to the library. I go over there just after work. He could be waiting for me there!

I am already in breach of standard operating procedure. When I received the first message, I needed to take it to my supervisor. The writer phrased things so that it appeared that I had violated procedure. On those terms, I was helpless to pursue the matter.

The longer that I say nothing, the more that I am implicated. Moreover, my subsequent actions have only made me more culpable.

If this is a test, I could be doing the right thing. I have maintained secrecy about my position. I have avoided compromising anyone else until I have resolved all the details of the conspiracy. Assuming that my supervisor is involved, talking to him would only give him further advantage. And if he is not involved, I don't want to make him more exposed to the fall out. I am continuing to do my job as if nothing happened.

I love how I am telling myself that it is all right. I know that it is not. My nemesis bides his time as the heat is on me. And it feels positively tropical. I need some relief!

I see that I am going around in a circle. I need to break the cycle. I am only becoming more alienated in the process.

We are in the employee cafeteria. Deb is explaining what they expect of us here at the agency. I am staring at her glass of milk. She is drinking milk.

–They want all the women to be married. It demonstrates that they are stable and serious about the job.

I wonder why all the girls here are single.

–Do you have any prospects?

Deb seems extra curious.

–Not really.

No, I have been answering personal ads from some mysterious psycho. Deb is completely oblivious to the world around her. Just give her a paycheck, and she is content to her heart's desire.

–There's a Fall Sale at Macy's on Saturday. Do you want to come with?

–I'm going to have to pass.

–You never spend money on clothes. You could use some new duds.

She has to be delusional. She looks like she takes dressing tips from old episodes of *Little House on the Prairie*. Indeed, she has to be a spy hired by the agency to keep an eye on me. There is nothing else to account for her cluelessness.

–Deb, are you going to drink your milk.

–I'm saving it to have with my dessert.

–What is dessert? *Oreos*.

–No, some kind of pudding. It's really good.

–I bet it is. I should have got some whipping cream to put on top.

–They don't serve whipping cream, here. Except on special occasions.

–I feel special today!

She smiles. Maybe she is human after all.

–We could go out for a drink sometime.

–I don't drink.

Of course, you don't. You're Mormon.

–I mean I might drink if I found a guy that I could trust. But you know how you hear those stories about girls getting dosed at bars. I had a friend, and some guy put roofies in her drink and two guys kidnaped her.

No doubt the agency again. These women need to keep an eye on things.

That's what they are going to do to me. No one will know the difference. Slip some drugs in my drink, and let me expire from a heart attack.

–Do you ever wonder what they do with all the information that they gather here?

–I know for sure. They catch criminals.

She has been watching too much television. I don't want to upset her nursery rhyme.

–So you admitted that you have some prospects.

–My neighbor has been saying some stuff to me. But they tell us not to reveal too much about ourselves.

I guess that dating is forbidden for her. All those guys are kind of freaky.

I watch her pour some of the milk in the pudding. She expects me to do the same except I haven't ordered the milk.

–Is it good?

–All nice and creamy.

After lunch Deb heads back to her cubicle like a perfect little miss. I try to copy her enthusiasm. It is a long afternoon. Loads of information to process. I again come across one of his messages. How does he know that I will be the recipient of both.

Do you know what they do with the lists that you prepare? All the evidence that you gather. You no doubt assume that they are preparing cases to be filed legally. This will never

happen.

If you have questioned your superiors, they have probably shown you documents that indicate there are warrants for the searches. Of course, warrants have never been prepared. There were warrants that were obtained for other material. And they are being used as the pretext for all the information gathering that is done under their auspices. But there is no legal basis for the information gathering that you are engaged in. You have admitted as much to yourself. If they find something, they will use it as the basis for granting them the present authority. All this is done after the fact.

What is the result of conducting an operation based on such flimsy grounds? This is the precedent for a total license granted to the agency. This is not about a legal trial. No limitations will be placed on the agency to execute its mandate. You are preparing and verifying lists for assassination.

Information is never neutral! He who has it has power. And he who has the power will eventually use it. Power has no limits in the pursuit of its goals!

You cannot allow the agency access to the desired information. It will only lead to terrible consequences. The agency does not want to risk taking these cases to court. If they lose, all their work will be lost.

They need inexperienced people like you to bear the brunt for any transgression incurred under this program. I'm sure your pride is a little wounded reading this. It is all for the best. Now is the time to admit your role in this fiasco and start to do something to change things.

He is assuming his role as my moral adviser. I guess that I need to step back from what I have been doing and take a good look at the agency. All this may be an exaggeration on his part. It's not as if it is going to be that difficult for the government to make their case once we have collected evidence. He believes that all this evidence is inadmissible in court. So be it. But to think that the government is going to engage in assassination is the stuff of silly conspiracy theory. Law would forbid such application from taking place.

Even if those in power wanted to create hit squads, there is no way that they would let them operate on America soil. If I am being pressured to question my superiors, then it is important that I examine the basis of these charges. This is utterly fantastic.

The agency is much worse than Murder Inc. They have created a legal and moral authorization for their actions. If they get away with this, the republic will be completely destroyed.

You may take consolation in the fact that you do not pull the trigger. But you are making all this possible. Worse. You are providing arguments which make these people seem like enemies of the state. You are maintaining that the health of the state relies on action on your investigation.

As he proceeds, he is becoming more accusatory. I feel totally implicated by his accusations.

The agency has created a culture that appears entirely consistent with his accusations. It is up to me to question my superiors. I am being asked to engage in a thorough interrogation of

their motives. In this regard, I will eventually determine the source of fallibility of the system. Even under these conditions, I will accept the terms of my employment. My guilt will not prevent me from embracing the overall philosophy of the agency.

My superiors are extremely adept. They are making me make the decision. They are calling me out. And eventually, I will have to give in. They are brilliant. They can guess my every move. They even know at what point I will rebel!

I can't keep still. This missive is not like the previous messages. The reasoning has been brought to its logical conclusion. There is no middle ground. To go along is to admit that the messages are fake. And if I challenge the dominant point of view, I will be isolating myself.

The arguments are too self-confident to be real. They are most definitely a plant. Who is behind this? Am I being groomed for something more important. So this is my invitation to become part of the inner circle. I need to make sure that I do not crack under the stress.

As I work through my job, it is becoming more and more difficult to do the routine tasks. I now envision the pattern. I am piecing together bits of unrelated information to conform to a very rigid picture. I feel as if I am framing innocent people. This is only the beginning of the slaughter of the innocents.

What am I going to do? Things happen. But this has gone too far. I need to come up with a new strategy. How am I going to move further up the chain of command. What if I set up my supervisor?

–What is this about?

–You are involved.

–Involved in what?

–With him. Don't think that you can get away with it.

I can't do it. I can't go through with it.

–I need some time off.

–You will get some time off soon.

–I feel as if I am going out of my mind.

–We could have you talk to the psychologist.

–Something strange is going on. And it's real.

–Maybe you could offer more detail.

I keep rearranging the details. I am not sure what to say. There is little that I can do without more damning evidence.

You don't have to depend on what you have in your possession. You know how to create a case out of nothing. Do what you do best. It is more than obvious that this is your test. If you fail, you will be fired.

I am going to have to destroy my supervisor. I have little choice. Maybe I can bring Deb in on the scandal. She is the perfect scapegoat. It's not as if she has an evil bone in her body. But her stupidity is dangerous. I need to take a stand. I only have to connect the dots.

–April, I need to see you.

–What is this about?

–There has been a spike of activity in your sector. You first brought it to our attention.

We did a follow up. This could be the basis of a promotion.

He still has no idea what is going on.

–I think that this could be the basis of an arrest, and an eventual conviction.

He is trying to confuse me . He knows that I know. None of this is admissible in court. I am going to let him cook his own goose.

–Deb could help with this. She told me about some corroborating data from her region as well.

How can I get Deb to confirm all this?

I know that you are lonely. Long hours at your job. You find it difficult to meet new people. You don't want to waste your life without some kind of affection. You have done so much for the world. Someone needs to give back to you!

Just enough to entice her the way that I have been enticed.

I see you all the time. I ache to be with you. I have to meet you in public so that we can share our love.

This is just the beginning.

I can leave my wife for you. I hate to let my children go. But if that is what I must do for love, I will bear the ultimate price.

Deb is an easy mark. And the two of them seem to be doing all the work for me. This is easier than shooting fish in a barrel.

I monitor their emails. And when they are not going at full speed, I add a little juice to get it all back into gear.

At this point in my training, I think that the most difficult thing is to maintain a consistent picture of reality. I am trying to do exactly this for the suspects that I track. I create a coherent image from seemingly contradictory details.

My nemesis is becoming my teacher. He is teaching me that my enemy is faceless. I can create him from nothing. I can put words in his mouth. Give him a profile. I can provide him with a credit history, a record of his purchases. I give the force of history a direction. I am learning the game, and I am getting good at it.

This operation has never been about discovery. It's primary goal has been to fabricate out of nothing. I am the enemy. I am giving myself a new identity to accord with my adopted role. I recognize how easy it is to move within the organization. Deb and my former supervisor are all things of the past. I have put it all behind me. I have created my private fiefdom within the confines of the agency.

It is a simple task to construct a conversation out of these meaningless bits. I can offer my opponents the intent and the means to do themselves in. They become threats to national security. I give them the coveted opportunity to show themselves.

I know their preferences. I know what they crave, and I supply it to them. I can even

create the conditions of that engender their appetites.

- I just need someone to hold me all night long.
- Hello, stranger!

Now that I have got your started, you owe me. And I will call on you when the time is right. You recognized from the beginning that something was amiss about the operation. You have used this flaw to your advantage. You have given voice to those who were hiding in the darkness. They have come out in the open and are now subject to discipline. They have committed themselves.

I am you. I have always been you. You have been waiting for me to give you the opportunity to speak. And you have spoken clearly. It is all the same. The only difference is what kind of authority you bring to your voice.

-The organization is waiting for you to find a man, to settle down. It doesn't want its employees to waver among constantly changing delights.

- So why are all the women single?*
- The work is so demanding. It's hard to please a man.*
- So we are all married to the organization.*
- That is why everyone parties so hard.*
- I thought that is frowned upon by the superiors.*
- It is. But they also realize that is the only way that everyone will fail to catch on.*
- So it's almost as if we're drugged.*

-You used me.

-No more than you used us.

-But you just wanted me to show myself.

-And you did. It did surprise us a little. After going through so much training, we thought that you'd stay with it.

-It's not as if I quit.

-But you didn't follow procedure.

-How could I? I had no way to figure out where the messages came from.

-We taught you how to analyze.

-And Deb could figure out this sort of shit.

-She never had a chance.

-I know that he's a problem for you. I can have him transferred.

-I don't want to let on that I know.

-What do you know?

-That he's a plant. A set up.

-What are you telling me?

-You want me to admit that I'm a mole.

I laugh as she explains things to me.

-Who are you working for?

–Don't tell me that you are behind those emails.

She becomes embarrassed. Then she realizes that things are only going to get worse.

I have almost completed my message. I need to make sure that she stumbles upon it. I take advantage of the chaotic.