

# Scroogled

*By Cory Doctorow*



O Google controla  
seu e-mail,  
seus vídeos,  
sua agenda,  
suas buscas...  
E se ele controlasse a  
sua vida?

Cory Doctorow

# Scroogled

E se o Google resolvesse controlar a sua vida?

Tradução e versão em PDF por Marco Aurélio Thompson

[www.escoladehackers.com.br](http://www.escoladehackers.com.br)

= 2008 =

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“(...) nada há encoberto que não haja de revelar-se,  
nem oculto que não haja de saber-se.”

*Mateus 10:26*



*"Dêem-me seis linhas escritas pelo mais honrado dos homens e eu encontrarei nelas uma desculpa para enforcá-lo."*

Cardeal Richelieu

*"Não sabemos o suficiente sobre si."*

CEO do Google Eric Schmidt



O avião de Greg aterrisou no aeroporto internacional de São Francisco às 20 horas, mas até finalmente ser atendido na fila para a alfândega, já se passava da meia-noite.

Viajou na primeira classe. Estava com o bronzeado perfeito, a barba por fazer. Chegava após ter passado um mês na praia no Cabo, mergulhando três dias por semana, seduzindo estudantes Francesas no resto do tempo.

Apenas um mês antes, era um destroço andante de ombros caídos e barrigudo. Agora era um deus bronzeado, que atraía os olhares femininos por onde passava.

Depois de quatro horas na fila para a alfândega, tinha novamente passado de deus a mero mortal. O seu aspecto admirável estava gasto, suor escorria pelo rego do seu traseiro, e os seus ombros e pescoço estava tão tensos que o tronco parecia uma raquete de tênis. A bateria do iPod já se esgotara há muito, deixando-o sem nada para fazer senão escutar a conversa do casal de meia-idade que se encontrava à sua frente.

"As maravilhas da tecnologia moderna", disse a mulher, referindo-se a um sinal que estava por perto:

Imigração – Powered by Google

"Não era suposto começarem apenas no próximo mês?" disse o homem, que alternadamente usava e segurava um sombrero de grandes dimensões.

Greg tinha vendido todas as suas ações do Google seis meses antes, esperando tirar algum tempo para si – algo que se mostrou menos compensador do que ele esperava.

Na maior parte do tempo dos cinco meses que se seguiram se dedicou a consertar os PCs dos amigos, ver TV durante o dia e acabou com mais cinco quilos em seu peso, que culpava ser devido ao tempo que passava em casa, em vez de estar no Googleplex<sup>1</sup> seguindo o seu programa físico de 24 horas no ginásio.

Ele já devia ter imaginado. O governo dos Estados Unidos investiu 15 bilhões de dólares em um programa para capturar impressões digitais e fotografias nas fronteiras, sem ter apanhado um único terrorista. Era óbvio que o setor público não estava equipado para realizar estas pesquisas de forma adequada.

O agente do DHS<sup>2</sup> observava as malas que tinha à sua frente, enquanto verificava o que se passava na tela do aparelho de raios-X, teclando vagarosamente com seus dedos gordos como salsichas. Não admirava a demora de quatro horas para sair do aeroporto.

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<sup>1</sup> Complexo de edifícios que formam a sede do Google, localizado na cidade de Mountain View, Califórnia.

<sup>2</sup> O Departamento de Segurança Nacional dos Estados Unidos (em inglês: *United States Department of Homeland Security*), abreviado como DHS e geralmente chamado de Segurança Nacional (*Homeland Security*), é uma secretaria federal do Governo dos Estados Unidos que tem a responsabilidade de proteger o território nacional de ataques terroristas e responder a desastres naturais. A secretaria foi criada a partir de 22 órgãos federais já existentes em resposta aos atentados de 11 de setembro de 2001.

"Boa noite", disse Greg, entregando seu passaporte. O agente murmurou alguma coisa inteligível e o passou no leitor, olhando para a tela enquanto batia os dedos no teclado. Ele tinha uns restos de comida ressequida no canto da boca e a sua língua saia para lambar o que restava.

"Quer falar o que aconteceu em junho de 1998?"

Greg olhou para ele e disse. "Como?"

"Você colocou uma mensagem em alt.burningman<sup>3</sup> em 17 de junho de 1998, sobre os seus planos para ir a um festival. Você perguntou '*São os alucinógenos assim tão nocivos?*'"

O interrogador na sala de controle era um homem mais velho, tão magro que de frente parecia estar de lado. E de lado parecia ter ido embora. As suas perguntas iam muito além da curiosidade de Greg sobre alucinógenos.

"Fale-me sobre seus passatempos. Você gosta de aeromodelismo ou lançamento de réplicas de foguetes em miniatura?"

"O quê?"

"Foguetes em miniatura."

"Não," disse Greg, "Não, não lido com isto." Já imaginando o rumo que a conversa ia tomar.

O homem tomou umas notas e digitou qualquer coisa. "Pergunto isto porque vejo um grande número de anúncios relacionados a

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<sup>3</sup> <http://groups.google.com/group/alt.burningman>

combústivel de avião nos resultados de suas pesquisas no Google e também no e-Mail."

Greg sentiu um aperto. "Você está vendo os resultados das pesquisas que fiz? Está acessando meu e-Mail?" Greg não tocava num computador há mais de um mês, mas sabia que o que tivesse introduzido naquele campo de pesquisa seria bem mais revelador do que tudo o que já tinha dito ao seu psiquiatra.

"Senhor, tenha calma, por favor. Não estou vendo suas pesquisas e nem acessando seu e-Mail", disse o homem com seriedade.

"Isto seria violação de privacidade e é anticonstitucional. Nós apenas vemos os anúncios que aparecem quando você lê seu e-Mail e faz pesquisas no Google. Tenho aqui um folheto da companhia que explica tudo. Poderá lê-lo quando terminarmos."

"Mas os anúncios não significam nada", contestou Greg. "Eu recebo anúncios de termas toda vez que recebo por e-Mail notícias de uma amiga em meu celular. Ela fala muito de uma cadela que cuida desde filhote!"

O homem acenou em concordância. "Entendo. E é exatamente por isso que estou falando contigo. Porque acha que estes anúncios sobre combústivel de aviação aparecem tão frequentemente?"

Greg pôs os neurônios para funcionar. "Faça isto. Procure por **clube do café**". Ele era um membro bastante ativo do clube, ajudando-os a lançar o site e o serviço café-do-mês. A mistura

que iam lançar chamava-se **Jet Fuel**<sup>4</sup>. "Jet Fuel" e "lançamento" – isso faria com que o Google enchesse a página com anúncios de combustível para motores a jato e aviação.

Já estavam na reta final da entrevista quando o funcionário encontrou as fotos do Halloween. Estavam na terceira página dos resultados da busca por "Greg Lupinski".

"Era uma festa com o tema Guerra do Golfo," disse ele.

"E você está vestido de...?"

"Homem bomba", respondeu meio constrangido. Dizer aquelas palavras era bastante comprometedor àquela altura do campeonato.

"Venha comigo, Sr. Lupinski," disse o agente.

Quando foi liberado já passava das três horas da manhã. As suas malas esperavam por ele ao lado do tapete de transporte.

Quando as pegou, percebeu que tinham sido inspecionadas e fechadas sem qualquer cuidado. Sua roupa parecia querer fugir pelos cantos, de tão apertado que ficou o novo arranjo ao fecharem as malas.

Ao chegar em casa descobriu que todas as suas estatuetas falsas do período pré-colombiano estavam trincadas e a sua camisa mexicana branca, novinha, agora tinha marcas de sujeira, como se tivesse caído no chão e alguém pisado. As suas roupas já não cheiravam a México, cheiravam a aeroporto.

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<sup>4</sup> N.T.: combustível de jato

Ele não ia conseguir dormir. De forma alguma. Ele precisava falar sobre isto. Só havia uma pessoa que o entenderia. Felizmente, ela costumava ficar acordada até tarde.

Maya tinha começado a trabalhar no Google dois anos depois de Greg. Ela que o convenceu a ir ao México depois de vender as ações: “a qualquer lugar”, disse ela, “onde pudesse refletir e curtir a vida”.

Maya tinha um casal de labradores<sup>5</sup> gigantes castanhos e uma namorada com muita, muita paciência, chamada Laurie que aturava tudo, exceto ser arrastada pelo parque às seis horas da manhã por 160kg de canídeos espalhando baba por todos os cantos.

Maya preparou-se para dar um abraço em Greg, que corria em sua direção: "Onde está o resto de ti? A viagem realmente te fez bem."

Ele abraçou-a de volta, percebendo subitamente seu forte odor corporal após uma noite de Googling invasivo. "Maya," disse ele, "o que você sabe sobre o Google e o DHS?"

Assim que ele fez a pergunta ela mudou de atitude. Um dos cães começou a grunhir. Ela olhou em redor e depois fez um sinal em direção a quadra de tênis. "No topo daquele poste de iluminação;

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<sup>5</sup> **Retriever do Labrador** (ou carinhosamente, *Labrador* ou *Lab*), é uma das mais conhecidas raças de cão. Notabiliza-se por sua amabilidade, inteligência e obediência. Devido a estas características, são frequentemente treinados para cães de caça, de assistência, como cães-guia ou de serviço. A raça Labrador é uma das mais populares em todo o mundo, em especial nos Estados Unidos da América (EUA) e na Europa.

não olhe", disse ela. "Aquele é um dos nossos pontos de acesso Wi-Fi municipais. Tem uma câmera de segurança com lente grande angular. Não fale virado naquela direção."

No grande esquema das coisas, não tinha custado muito ao Google para colocar câmaras por toda a cidade. Especialmente quando comparado com a capacidade de distribuir anúncios de acordo com os locais de maior movimentação de pessoas. Greg não tinha prestado muita atenção quando todas aquelas câmaras em todos os pontos de acesso foram tornadas públicas – durante um dia houve um *frisson* com as pessoas interagindo com aquele novo brinquedo e assistiam no noticiário cenas de zoom em várias zonas de prostituição, mas rapidamente a excitação se dissipou. Virou rotina. Integrou-se ao cotidiano como coisa normal.

Incrédulo, Greg murmurou, "Está me zoando!?"

"Vem comigo", disse ela, virando-se para longe do poste.

Os cães não estavam contentes com a redução do passeio e mostravam seu desagrado na cozinha enquanto Maya fazia café.

"Negociamos um acordo com o DHS", disse ela, procurando o leite. "Eles concordaram em deixar de vasculhar nossos registros, e nós concordamos em deixá-los ver os anúncios exibidos a cada usuário."

Greg ficou doente. "Por quê? Não me diga que o Yahoo! também já fazia isso!?"

"Não, não. Isto é, sim. Claro. O Yahoo! já fazia isso. Mas não foi por isso que o Google concordou. Sabe, os Republicanos odeiam o Google. Somos majoritariamente Democratas registrados, portanto estamos tentando apenas fazer um acordo de paz com eles antes que nos massacrem. Isto não é P.I.I.<sup>6</sup>" - Informação de Identificação Pessoal – "É apenas metadata<sup>7</sup>. Portanto é apenas ligeiramente maléfico."

"Então, por que toda a intriga?"

Maya suspirou e abraçou o labrador que pousava a sua enorme cabeça entre suas pernas. "Os agentes são como piolhos. Metem-se por todo o lado. Aparecem nas nossas reuniões. É como trabalhar num ministério soviético. Todos nós sabemos quem não é admitido, mas ninguém sabe o porquê. Eu passei. Que sorte a minha – ser lésbica aparentemente já não é motivo para ser eliminada. E ninguém com autorização se dignaria a almoçar com alguém que não a tenha conseguido."

Greg sentiu-se muito cansado. "Então acho que tive sorte em sair do aeroporto com vida. Podia ter desaparecido se as coisas tivessem corrido mal, hein?"

Maya fixou o olhar por uns instantes. Ele aguardou uma resposta.

"O quê foi?"

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<sup>6</sup> Personally Identifiable Information

<sup>7</sup> Metadados ou Metainformação são dados sobre outros dados.

"Vou lhe contar uma coisa, mas nunca poderá repeti-la, está bem?"

"Hummm... não vai me dizer que você faz parte de uma célula terrorista!?"

"Nada disso. É assim: a entrevista do DHS no aeroporto serve como filtro. Permite aos agentes eliminarem quem não interessa. Uma vez levado a sala de interrogação secundária, passa a ser uma 'pessoa de interesse' – e nunca mais te abandonarão. Eles pesquisarão por você em todas as câmaras de segurança públicas. Irão ler teu e-mail. Analisar tuas pesquisas."

"Pensei que tinha dito que os tribunais não os deixaria fazer isso!?"

"Os tribunais não autorizam Googlar-te indiscriminadamente. Mas depois que você entra no sistema, se torna uma pesquisa seletiva. Tudo dentro da legalidade. E uma vez que comecem a pesquisar-te, encontrarão sempre algo. Todos os teus dados são analisados em busca de 'padrões suspeitos' usando diferenças em relação a médias estatísticas, para te apanharem."

Greg sentiu como se fosse vomitar. "Como é que isto aconteceu? O Google era bom. 'Não era para ser mau,' certo?" Era o lema da companhia, e para Greg isso tinha sido um fator decisivo para que levasse seu doutorado em Ciências da Computação de Stanford para Mountain View.

Maya respondeu com um sorriso irônico. "Não ser mau? Ora essa, Greg. O nosso bando é o mesmo bando de cripto-fascistas que tratou de Kerry<sup>8</sup>. Já perdemos a virgindade maléfica há muito tempo."

Ficaram em silêncio durante um minuto.

"Começou na China", ela prosseguiu finalmente. "Mal colocamos os nossos servidores para o continente, eles ficaram sobre jurisdição Chinesa."

Greg suspirou. Ele conhecia o poder do Google bem demais: cada vez que alguém visitasse uma página com anúncios do Google, ou usasse os mapas do Google, ou o e-mail do Google – a companhia recolhia e armazenava todas essas informações.

Só recentemente o algoritmo de buscas tinha começado a usar essas informações para que os resultados apresentados fossem de encontro ao que cada usuário queria. Provou ser um sistema revolucionário para a publicidade. Um governo autoritário certamente teria outros objetivos em mente.

"Usaram-nos para construir perfis de pessoas," disse ela.

"Quando tinham alguém que quisessem prender, vinham até nós para encontrarmos uma razão para que o fizessem. Dificilmente há algo que possas fazer na Internet que não seja ilegal na China."

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<sup>8</sup> O ex-candidato a presidência dos EUA pelo Partido Democrata, John Kerry, foi alvo de *Google-bombing*.

Greg balançou a cabeça. "Por que tiveram que colocar os servidores na China?"

"O governo disse que nos bloquearia se não concordássemos. E o Yahoo! já lá estava." Ambos fizeram caretas. Os empregados do Google ficaram obcecados com o Yahoo!, mais preocupados com o que a concorrência fazia do que com a sua própria companhia. "Foi por isso que aceitamos. Muitos de nós não gostamos da ideia."

Maya bebeu mais um gole de café e baixou a voz. Um dos seus cães cheirava insistentemente a cadeira onde Greg sentou.

"Quase imediatamente após a instalação dos servidores, os Chineses pediram para que censurássemos os resultados das pesquisas", disse Maya. "O Google concordou. A explicação era hilariante: 'Não estamos fazendo mal, estamos fornecendo um motor de pesquisa melhor aos consumidores! Se mostrássemos resultados que depois eles não poderiam acessar, isto seria frustrante para eles. Seria uma má experiência para o usuário.'"

"E agora?" disse Greg empurrando o cão para longe dele. Maya olhou-o com ar magoado.

"Agora você é uma pessoa de interesse, Greg. Será um Google-perseguido. Viverá a tua vida com alguém olhando constantemente por cima do seu ombro. Conhece a missão da empresa, certo? 'Organizar a Informação Mundial.' Tudo. Daqui a cinco anos saberemos quantos cagalhões têm no sanitário antes mesmo de puxar a descarga. Junte isso com a suspeição

automática de todos os que sejam estatisticamente considerados suspeitos e estás "Scroogled".

Maya levou os dois labradores através do corredor para o quarto. Ele ouviu uma discussão abafada de Maya com sua namorada, e ela voltou sozinha.

"Eu consigo resolver isto", disse ela num sussurro urgente.

"Depois que os Chineses começaram sumir com as pessoas, eu e os meus colegas dedicamos os nossos 20% de tempo para projetos<sup>9</sup>, pensando em como foder com eles." "Chamamos de Google-cleaner (Google-limpar). É um algoritmo que acessa as profundezas da base de dados e a normaliza estatisticamente. As tuas pesquisas, os teus histogramas, os padrões de navegação, tudo."

"Greg, eu posso Google-limpar-te. É a única maneira."

"Não quero vê-la metida em confusão por minha causa."

Ela acenou com a cabeça. "Eu já estou envolvida. Desde que criei aquilo tenho estado à espera. É só uma questão de tempo até que alguém me mencione ao DHS e, sei lá. Que façam o que quiserem nesta guerra de anônimos."

Greg recordou o que tinha passado no aeroporto. A pesquisa. A camisa, com a pegada bem no meio. Os souvenirs quebrados.

"Faz isso", disse ele.

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<sup>9</sup> Uma das inovações do Google é uma regra que estipulava que cada empregado devia dedicar 20% do seu tempo a projetos alternativos à sua escolha. Foi assim que surgiu o Orkut, como projeto do funcionário Orkut Büyükkökten.

O Googlecleaner funcionou perfeitamente. Greg podia confirmar pelos anúncios que apareciam nas suas pesquisas, anúncios claramente destinados a outras pessoas: Design Inteligente, Graduação a Distância, Um Amanhã Livre de Terror, Filtros Anti-Pornografia, América contra o Homossexualismo, Passagens Aéreas Promocionais. Era o programa da Maya em funcionamento. Era óbvio que a procura personalizada do Google o considerava alguém completamente diferente, um militante de direita temente a Deus.

Por ele, estava bem. Melhor que viver marcado pelo Google.

Depois clicou na sua lista de endereços e descobriu que metade dos seus contatos tinha desaparecido. A sua caixa de entrada do Gmail estava vazia como uma caixa de madeira comida por cupim. O seu perfil no Orkut, normalizado. O seu calendário, fotografias de família, favoritos: tudo vazio. Ele nunca tinha percebido o quanto dele fora transferido para a Web e ido parar num servidor Google – toda a sua identidade on-line. Maya o deixara completamente limpo; tornara-se um homem invisível.

Greg tocou, ainda sonolento, nas teclas do portátil ao lado da cama, trazendo o desktop de volta à vida. Esforçou-se por fixar os olhos no relógio da barra de ferramentas: 4:13! “Raios, quem bateria à porta a esta hora da madrugada?”

Gritou, "Já vou!" numa voz esganiçada. Vestiu um roupão e uma pantufa do Mickey. Arrastou os pés ao longo do corredor, ligando

as luzes pelo caminho. À porta, espreitou pelo olho mágico e deu de cara com Maya a olhar em volta, visivelmente preocupada.

Tirou as correntes de proteção, destrancou a porta e a abriu de rompante. Maya passou por ele apressada, seguida dos seus cães e da namorada.

Estava coberta de suor, o seu cabelo normalmente penteado, estava colado em sua testa. Esfregou os olhos, que estavam vermelhos e pintados.

"Faz uma mala," disse sem fôlego.

"O quê?"

Ela agarrou-o pelos ombros. "Faz o que te digo," disse.

"Mas para onde vamos!?"

"Provavelmente para o México. Ainda não sei. Se vista rápido!"

Ela afastou-o da sala e seguiram para o quarto, onde começou a puxar todas as gavetas.

"Maya," disse ele sério, "Não vou a lugar algum antes de saber o que está acontecendo!?"

Ela olhou para ele e afastou os cabelos do rosto. "O Google-cleaner está vivo. Depois de te limpo a ti, desliguei-o permanentemente. Era demasiado perigoso para ser usado novamente. No entanto, continua programado para me enviar e-mails sempre que alguém o tenha executado. E alguém já o usou seis vezes para limpar três contas bem específicas – sendo que

todas elas pertencem a membros do Comit  de Com rcio do Senado que est o para ser reeleitos."

"Os Googlers est o a limpar senadores?"

"Os Googlers n o. Isto teve origem externa. O bloco do IP de origem est  registado em D.C.<sup>10</sup> e todos os IPs s o usados por usu rios do Gmail. Adivinha a quem pertencem estas contas?"

"Espionou as contas do Gmail?"

"Sim. Dei uma olhada nos e-Mails deles. Todos fazem isso de vez em quando e por motivos bem menos nobres que os meus. Mas repara, toda esta atividade est  sendo feita pelo nosso pessoal. Apenas fazendo o seu trabalho, defendendo os interesses da companhia."

Greg sentiu a pulsa o subir e a cabe a latejar. "Dev amos contar a algu m..."

"N o vai servir de nada. Eles sabem tudo sobre n s. Podem ver todas as nossas pesquisas. Todos os e-Mail. Todas  s vezes que passarmos por uma c mara de seguran a. Quem est  na nossa rede de amigos... sabe que se tiver mais de quinze amigos no Orkut   altamente prov vel que estejas a apenas tr s passos de algu m que tenha contribuido com dinheiro para uma causa 'terrorista'? Lembra do aeroporto? Vai passar por aquilo tudo muitas mais vezes."

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<sup>10</sup> D.C.   a abrevia o de Distrito de Col mbia e onde est  localizada a sede do governo estadunidense.

"Maya", disse Greg, procurando orientar-se. "Ir para o México... não será exagero? Peça demissão e pronto. Podemos começar uma nova companhia ou fazer algo do gênero. Fugir é uma loucura."

"Eles vieram falar comigo hoje", disse ela. "Dois dos agentes políticos do DHS. Demoraram horas. E me fizeram montes de perguntas muito complicadas."

"Sobre o Googlecleaner?"

"Sobre os meus amigos e a minha família. O meu histórico de pesquisas. A minha história pessoal."

"Caralho!"

"Estavam me alertando. Que estão observando todos os cliques e todas as pesquisas. É hora de partir. De sair fora do alcance deles."

"Mas tem uma agência do Google no México, sabe disso."

"Temos que ir", disse ela, firmemente.

"Laurie, que pensa sobre isto?" perguntou Greg.

Laurie afagou os cães. "Os meus pais abandonaram a Alemanha Oriental em 65. Costumavam contar-me sobre a Stasi<sup>11</sup>. A polícia secreta arquivava tudo as pessoas. Se contou uma piada

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<sup>11</sup> A Stasi (forma curta de *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, "Ministério para a Segurança do Estado) era a principal organização de polícia secreta e inteligência da República Democrática Alemã (RDA), antiga designação de Alemanha Oriental.

antipatriótica, o que quer que fosse. Quer queiram quer não, o que o Google faz não é diferente."

"Greg, virá com a gente ou não?"

Ele olhou para os cães e declinou com a cabeça. "Ainda tenho alguns pesos<sup>12</sup> que sobraram," disse. "Levem-nos. E tenham cuidado, está bem?"

Maya olhou-o com uns olhos capazes de ódio. No entanto, amolecendo, deu-lhe um abraço apertado.

"Toma cuidado você também", sussurrou em seu ouvido.

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Vieram buscá-lo uma semana depois. Em casa, no meio da noite, tal como ele imaginava que fariam.

Dois homens chegaram à sua porta pouco depois das duas da manhã. Um ficou em silêncio. O outro era sorridente, pequeno e inquieto. Usava um casaco desportivo com uma mancha numa lapela e uma bandeira americana na outra. "Greg Lupinski, temos motivos para acreditar que você está em violação do Ato de Abuso e Fraude com Computadores<sup>13</sup>," disse ele, como apresentação. "Mais concretamente, por ultrapassar seu nível de acesso e por esses meios ter obtido informações. Dez anos de

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<sup>12</sup> Peso mexicano (MXN, anteriormente MXP).

<sup>13</sup> O Ato de Abuso e Fraude com Computadores de 1986 (Computer Fraud and Abuse Act) foi votado e transformado em lei pelo congresso americano baseado nos exploits de Ian Murphy, também conhecido com Capitão Zap, que violou computadores militares, roubou informações de bancos de dados de pedidos de mercadorias e utilizou os quadros restritos de distribuição de telefone do governo para efetuar ligações telefônicas.

prisão para começar. Aquilo que você e a sua amiga fizeram aos próprios registros do Google é crime. E tudo isso virá a público durante o julgamento... tudo o que vocês limparam dos seus perfis."

Greg já tinha imaginado esta cena na mente durante toda a semana. Tinha planejado todo o tipo de coisas corajosas para dizer. Era algo com que se entretinha enquanto esperava por notícias da Maya. Ela nunca ligou.

"Gostaria de falar com um advogado," foi tudo o que conseguiu dizer.

"Pode fazer isso", disse o agente. "Mas talvez possamos chegar a um acordo mais interessante."

Greg encontrou a sua coragem. "Gostaria de ver a sua identificação", reclamou.

O rosto bochechudo do homem iluminou-se numa gargalhada. "Colega, eu não sou da polícia", disse. "Sou um consultor. O Google contratou-me - a minha firma representa os interesses deles em Washington - para incentivar relações. Claro que não queremos envolver a polícia sem falarmos contigo primeiro. Você faz parte da família. Aliás, há uma proposta que gostaria de lhe fazer."

Greg virou-se para a máquina de fazer café, botando o filtro velho no lixo.

"Contarei à imprensa", disse.

O homem pensou por um momento. "Sim, claro. Poderia invadir a redação do Chronicle<sup>14</sup> pela manhã e contar-lhes tudo. Eles iriam procurar por uma fonte que confirmasse o que lhes dissesse. Não irão encontrá-la. E quando eles tentarem pesquisar por uma, o Google estará lá. Portanto, porque não ouves o que tenho a dizer, OK? Estou no negócio em que ambas as partes ganham sempre. E sou muito bom no que faço." Fez uma pausa. "Agora, esse café é excelente, mas devia limpar os grãos primeiro. Tira um pouco do amargo e realça o sabor. Empresta seu coador."

Greg observou enquanto o homem silenciosamente tirou o casaco e o pendurou numa cadeira da cozinha, depois arregaçou as mangas cuidadosamente, tirando um relógio digital barato do pulso e colocando-o no bolso. Retirou os grãos de café do moedor e limpou-os na pia da cozinha.

Ele era bastante pálido, parecendo um engenheiro elétrico. Na verdade, parecia um verdadeiro Googler, obcecado pelos pormenores. E se via que sabia mexer num moedor de café.

"Estamos recrutando uma equipe para o Edifício 49..."

"Não existe Edifício 49," disse Greg.

"Claro", disse o homem sorridente. "Não existe nenhum Edifício 49. Mas estamos preparando uma equipe para melhorar o Googlecleaner. Sabe, o programa da Maya não era muito

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.thebostonchannel.com/chronicle/index.html>

eficiente. Está cheio de bugs. Precisamos de um upgrade. Você seria a pessoa ideal, e não interessaria o que você sabe se voltar a trabalhar para nós novamente."

"Inacreditável", disse Greg, rindo-se. "Se pensam que vou ajudar vocês a difamar candidatos políticos em troca de favores, são mais malucos do que eu pensava."

"Greg", disse o homem, "não vamos difamar ninguém. Apenas vamos limpar um pouco as coisas. Para algumas pessoas em especial. Sabe a que me refiro? Todos têm algo assustador no perfil do Google, se analisado atentamente. E a análise atenta é o que está na ordem do dia na política. Concorrer a um cargo é como fazer uma colonoscopia em público." Carregou a máquina de café, mantendo o rosto em solene concentração. Greg pegou duas xícaras – com o símbolo do Google, obviamente - e entregou-as ao homem.

"Vamos fazer pelos nossos amigos aquilo que a Maya fez por si. Apenas uma pequena limpeza. Tudo o que queremos é preservar a privacidade. Apenas isso."

Greg provou o café. "E o que acontece aos candidatos que não se limpam?"

"É...", disse o homem, esboçando um sorriso forçado. "Tem razão. Será um pouco duro para eles." Procurou no bolso do casaco e tirou várias folhas de papel dobradas.

Ajeitou as folhas e colocou-as na mesa. "Aqui está uma das pessoas boas que precisa da nossa ajuda." Era uma listagem das pesquisas feitas por um candidato em quem Greg tinha votado nas três eleições anteriores.

"O homem regressa ao seu quarto de hotel depois de um dia brutal de campanha porta-a-porta, e escreve 'rola grossa' na sua barra de pesquisa. Nada de grave, certo? No nosso ponto de vista, impedir que um bom homem como este continue a servir o seu país vai contra o espírito americano."

Greg acenou com a cabeça vagorosamente.

"Então, vai ajudar o homem?" perguntou...

"Sim."

"Ainda bem. Há só mais uma coisa. Precisamos da sua ajuda para encontrar a Maya. Ela não percebeu os nossos objetivos e agora parece ter desaparecido do mapa. Assim que ela nos ouvir, tenho certeza que vai compreender."

Ele passou os olhos pela listagem dos resultados do candidato.

"Acho que sim", respondeu Greg.

Demorou apenas onze dias para que o novo Congresso aprovasse o Ato de Segurança e Enumeração das Comunicações e

Hipertexto, que autorizava o DHS e a NSA<sup>15</sup> a contratarem até 80% do serviço de inteligência e análise de empresas privadas.

Teoricamente, os contratos estavam sujeitos a concorrência pública, mas dentro do Edifício 49 do Google, não havia nenhuma dúvida sobre quem ganharia. Se o Google tivesse gasto quinze bilhões num programa para apanhar os criminosos na fronteira, podem crer que os apanharia. Os governos não estão preparados para fazer pesquisa direta.

Na manhã seguinte Greg olhava a si próprio cuidadosamente ao se barbear (os agentes não gostavam da aparência dos hackers, e não tinham qualquer pudor em dizê-lo), apercebendo-se que hoje seria o seu primeiro dia como agente a serviço do governo dos Estados Unidos. Seria isso assim tão mau? Não era melhor ter o Google a fazer isto em vez de um incompetente agente do DHS? Pela altura em que estacionou no Googleplex, entre os carros híbridos e parques de bicicletas, estava convencido. Pensava sobre qual suco orgânico iria pedir na cantina quando seu cartão de acesso deu erro ao abrir a porta do Edifício 49. A luz vermelha piscava incessantemente cada vez que ele passava o cartão. Em qualquer outro edifício seria fácil entrar atrás de outro colega, as pessoas entravam e saíam constantemente. Mas no Edifício 49 os Googlers apenas saíam para as refeições, e às vezes nem isso.

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<sup>15</sup> NSA ou National Security Agency (Agência de Segurança Nacional) criada em 4 de novembro de 1952 é responsável pela inteligência obtida a partir de sinais, incluindo interceptação e criptoanálise.

Passou o cartão mais uma dúzia de vezes. Subitamente ouviu uma voz ao seu lado.

"Greg, posso falar com você um momento, por favor?"

O homem colocou o braço sobre os ombros de Greg, e este sentiu o cheiro frutado e enjoativo do seu perfume. Cheirava tal e qual seu instrutor de mergulho quando saiam à noite para os bares. Greg já não recordava seu nome. Juan Carlos? Juan Luis?

O abraço do homem era firme, conduzindo-o para longe da porta, sobre a grama imaculada, passando pela parte externa da cozinha. "Vamos te dar uns dias de folga", disse ele.

Greg sentiu uma pontada de ansiedade. "Por quê?" Será que tinha feito algo errado? Iria para a cadeia?

"É a Maya." O homem virou-se, olhando Greg com um olhar infinito. "Ela suicidou-se na Guatemala. Lamento muito, Greg."

Greg sentiu-se lançado ao espaço, para um lugar milhares de quilômetros acima da superfície. Uma vista do Googleplex no Google Earth, onde olhava para si próprio e para aquele homem como um par de pontos, dois pixels, minúsculos e insignificantes. Desejou arrancar os seus próprios cabelos, cair sobre os seus joelhos e chorar.

Desse lugar muito distante ouviu a sua própria voz dizer, "Não preciso de nenhum tempo. Estou bem."

Desse lugar muito distante ouviu o homem insistir.

As insistências prosseguiram durante muito tempo, até que os dois pixels se dirigiram ao Edifício 49, e a porta fechou-se atrás deles.

**VERSÃO ORIGINAL EM INGLÊS**



**Cory Doctorow – Scroogled.**

"Give me six lines written by the most honorable of men, and I will find an excuse in them to hang him." - Cardinal Richelieu

"We don't know enough about you." - Google CEO Eric Schmidt



Greg landed at San Francisco International Airport at 8 p.m., but by the time he'd made it to the front of the customs line, it was after midnight. He'd emerged from first class, brown as a nut, unshaven, and loose-limbed after a month on the beach in Cabo (scuba diving three days a week, seducing French college girls the rest of the time). When he'd left the city a month before, he'd been a stoop-shouldered, potbellied wreck. Now he was a bronze god, drawing admiring glances from the stewards at the front of the cabin.

Four hours later in the customs line, he'd slid from god back to man. His slight buzz had worn off, sweat ran down the crack of his ass, and his shoulders and neck were so tense his upper back felt like a tennis racket. The batteries on his iPod had long since died, leaving him with nothing to do except eavesdrop on the middle-age couple ahead of him.

"The marvels of modern technology," said the woman, shrugging at a nearby sign: Immigration—Powered by Google.

"I thought that didn't start until next month?" The man was alternately wearing and holding a large sombrero.

Googling at the border. Christ. Greg had vested out of Google six months before, cashing in his options and "taking some me time"—which turned out to be less rewarding than he'd expected. What he mostly did over the five months that followed

was fix his friends' PCs, watch daytime TV, and gain 10 pounds, which he blamed on being at home instead of in the Googleplex, with its well-appointed 24-hour gym.

He should have seen it coming, of course. The U.S. government had lavished \$15 billion on a program to fingerprint and photograph visitors at the border, and hadn't caught a single terrorist. Clearly, the public sector was not equipped to Do Search Right.

The DHS officer had bags under his eyes and squinted at his screen, prodding at his keyboard with sausage fingers. No wonder it was taking four hours to get out of the god damned airport.

"Evening," Greg said, handing the man his sweaty passport. The officer grunted and swiped it, then stared at his screen, tapping. A lot. He had a little bit of dried food at the corner of his mouth and his tongue crept out and licked at it.

"Want to tell me about June 1998?"

Greg looked up from his Departures. "I'm sorry?"

"You posted a message to alt.burningman on June 17, 1998, about your plan to attend a festival. You asked, 'Are shrooms really such a bad idea?'"

The interrogator in the secondary screening room was an older man, so skinny he looked like he'd been carved out of wood. His questions went a lot deeper than shrooms.

"Tell me about your hobbies. Are you into model rocketry?"

"What?"

"Model rocketry."

"No," Greg said, "No, I'm not." He sensed where this was going.

The man made a note, did some clicking. "You see, I ask because I see a heavy spike in ads for rocketry supplies showing up alongside your search results and Google mail."

Greg felt a spasm in his guts. "You're looking at my searches and e-mail?" He hadn't touched a keyboard in a month, but he knew what he put into that search bar was likely more revealing than what he told his shrink.

"Sir, calm down, please. No, I'm not looking at your searches," the man said in a mocking whine. "That would be unconstitutional. We see only the ads that show up when you read your mail and do your searching. I have a brochure explaining it. I'll give it to you when we're through here."

"But the ads don't mean anything," Greg sputtered. "I get ads for Ann Coulter ring tones whenever I get e-mail from my friend in Coulter, Iowa!"

The man nodded. "I understand, sir. And that's just why I'm here talking to you. Why do you suppose model rocket ads show up so frequently?"

Greg racked his brain. "Okay, just do this. Search for 'coffee fanatics.'" He'd been very active in the group, helping them build out the site for their coffee-of-the-month subscription service. The blend they were going to launch with was called Jet Fuel. "Jet Fuel" and "Launch"—that would probably make Google barf up some model rocket ads.

They were in the home stretch when the carved man found the Halloween photos. They were buried three screens deep in the search results for "Greg Lupinski."

"It was a Gulf War–themed party," he said. "In the Castro."

"And you're dressed as...?"

"A suicide bomber," he replied sheepishly. Just saying the words made him wince.

"Come with me, Mr. Lupinski," the man said.

By the time he was released, it was past 3 a.m. His suitcases stood forlornly by the baggage carousel. He picked them up and saw they had been opened and carelessly closed. Clothes stuck out from around the edges.

When he returned home, he discovered that all of his fake pre-Columbian statues had been broken, and his brand-new white cotton Mexican shirt had an ominous boot print in the middle of it. His clothes no longer smelled of Mexico. They smelled like airport.

He wasn't going to sleep. No way. He needed to talk about this. There was only one person who would get it. Luckily, she was usually awake around this hour.

Maya had started working at Google two years after Greg had. It was she who'd convinced him to go to Mexico after he cashed out: Anywhere, she'd said, that he could reboot his existence.

Maya had two giant chocolate labs and a very, very patient girlfriend named Laurie who'd put up with anything except being dragged around Dolores Park at 6 a.m. by 350 pounds of drooling canine.

Maya reached for her Mace as Greg jogged toward her, then did a double take and threw her arms open, dropping the leashes and trapping them under her sneaker. "Where's the rest of you? Dude, you look hot!"

He hugged her back, suddenly conscious of the way he smelled after a night of invasive Googling. "Maya," he said, "what do you know about Google and the DHS?"

She stiffened as soon as he asked the question. One of the dogs began to whine. She looked around, then nodded up at the tennis courts. "Top of the light pole there; don't look," she said. "That's one of our muni WiFi access points. Wide-angle webcam. Face away from it when you talk."

In the grand scheme of things, it hadn't cost Google much to wire the city with webcams. Especially when measured against the ability to serve ads to people based on where they were sitting. Greg hadn't paid much attention when the cameras on all those access points went public—there'd been a day's worth of blogstorm while people played with the new all-seeing toy, zooming in on various prostitute cruising areas, but after a while the excitement blew over.

Feeling silly, Greg mumbled, "You're joking."

"Come with me," she said, turning away from the pole.

The dogs weren't happy about cutting their walk short, and expressed their displeasure in the kitchen as Maya made coffee.

"We brokered a compromise with the DHS," she said, reaching for the milk. "They agreed to stop fishing through our search records, and we agreed to let them see what ads got displayed for users."

Greg felt sick. "Why? Don't tell me Yahoo was doing it already..."

"No, no. Well, yes. Sure. Yahoo was doing it. But that wasn't the reason Google went along. You know, Republicans hate Google. We're overwhelmingly registered Democratic, so we're doing what we can to make peace with them before they clobber us. This isn't P.I.I."—Personally Identifying Information, the toxic smog of the information age—"It's just metadata. So it's only slightly evil."

"Why all the intrigue, then?"

Maya sighed and hugged the lab that was butting her knee with its huge head. "The spooks are like lice. They get everywhere. They show up at our meetings. It's like being in some Soviet ministry. And the security clearance—we're divided into these two camps: the cleared and the suspect. We all know who isn't cleared, but no one knows why. I'm cleared. Lucky for me, being a dyke no longer disqualifies you. No cleared person would deign to eat lunch with an unclearable."

Greg felt very tired. "So I guess I'm lucky I got out of the airport alive. I might have ended up 'disappeared' if it had gone badly, huh?"

Maya stared at him intently. He waited for an answer.

"What?"

"I'm about to tell you something, but you can't ever repeat it, okay?"

"Um...you're not in a terrorist cell, are you?"

"Nothing so simple. Here's the deal: Airport DHS scrutiny is a gating function. It lets the spooks narrow down their search criteria. Once you get pulled aside for secondary at the border, you become a 'person of interest'—and they never, ever let up. They'll scan webcams for your face and gait. Read your mail. Monitor your searches."

"I thought you said the courts wouldn't let them..."

"The courts won't let them indiscriminately Google you. But after you're in the system, it becomes a selective search. All legal. And once they start Googling you, they always find something. All your data is fed into a big hopper that checks for 'suspicious patterns,' using deviation from statistical norms to nail you."

Greg felt like he was going to throw up. "How the hell did this happen? Google was a good place. 'Don't be evil,' right?" That was the corporate motto, and for Greg, it had been a huge part of why he'd taken his computer science Ph.D. from Stanford directly to Mountain View.

Maya replied with a hard-edged laugh. "Don't be evil? Come on, Greg. Our lobbying group is that same bunch of crypto-fascists that tried to Swift-Boat Kerry. We popped our evil cherry a long time ago."

They were quiet for a minute.

"It started in China," she went on, finally. "Once we moved our servers onto the mainland, they went under Chinese jurisdiction."

Greg sighed. He knew Google's reach all too well: Every time you visited a page with Google ads on it, or used Google maps or Google mail—even if you sent mail to a Gmail account—the company diligently collected your info. Recently, the site's search-optimization software had begun using the data to tailor Web searches to individual users. It proved to be a revolutionary tool for advertisers. An authoritarian government would have other purposes in mind.

"They were using us to build profiles of people," she went on. "When they had someone they wanted to arrest, they'd come to us and find a reason to bust them. There's hardly anything you can do on the Net that isn't illegal in China."

Greg shook his head. "Why did they have to put the servers in China?"

"The government said they'd block us otherwise. And Yahoo was there." They both made faces. Somewhere along the way, employees at Google had become obsessed with Yahoo, more concerned with what the competition was doing than how their own company was performing. "So we did it. But a lot of us didn't like the idea."

Maya sipped her coffee and lowered her voice. One of her dogs sniffed insistently under Greg's chair.

"Almost immediately, the Chinese asked us to start censoring search results," Maya said. "Google agreed. The company line was hilarious: 'We're not doing evil—we're giving consumers access to a better search tool! If we showed them search results they couldn't get to, that would just frustrate them. It would be a bad user experience.'"

"Now what?" Greg pushed a dog away from him. Maya looked hurt.

"Now you're a person of interest, Greg. You're Googlestalked. Now you live your life with someone constantly looking over your shoulder. You know the mission statement, right? 'Organize the World's Information.' Everything. Give it five years, we'll know how many turds were in the bowl before you flushed. Combine that with automated suspicion of anyone who matches a statistical picture of a bad guy and you're—"

"Scroogled."

"Totally." She nodded.

Maya took both labs down the hall to the bedroom. He heard a muffled argument with her girlfriend, and she came back alone.

"I can fix this," she said in an urgent whisper. "After the Chinese started rounding up people, my podmates and I made it our 20 percent project to fuck with them." (Among Google's business innovations was a rule that required every employee to devote 20 percent of his or her time to high-minded pet projects.) "We call it the Googlecleaner. It goes deep into the database and statistically normalizes you. Your searches, your Gmail histograms, your browsing patterns. All of it. Greg, I can Googleclean you. It's the only way."

"I don't want you to get into trouble."

She shook her head. "I'm already doomed. Every day since I built the damn thing has been borrowed time—now it's just a matter of waiting for someone to point out my expertise and history to the DHS and, oh, I don't know. Whatever it is they do to people like me in the war on abstract nouns."

Greg remembered the airport. The search. His shirt, the boot print in the middle of it.

"Do it," he said.

The Googlecleaner worked wonders. Greg could tell by the ads that popped up alongside his searches, ads clearly meant for someone else: Intelligent Design Facts, Online Seminary Degree, Terror Free Tomorrow, Porn Blocker Software, the Homosexual Agenda, Cheap Toby Keith Tickets. This was Maya's program at work. Clearly Google's new personalized search had him pegged

as someone else entirely, a God-fearing right winger with a thing for hat acts.

Which was fine by him.

Then he clicked on his address book, and found that half of his contacts were missing. His Gmail in-box was hollowed out like a termite-ridden stump. His Orkut profile, normalized. His calendar, family photos, bookmarks: all empty. He hadn't quite realized before how much of him had migrated onto the Web and worked its way into Google's server farms—his entire online identity. Maya had scrubbed him to a high gloss; he'd become the invisible man.

Greg sleepily mashed the keys on the laptop next to his bed, bringing the screen to life. He squinted at the flashing toolbar clock: 4:13 a.m.! Christ, who was pounding on his door at this hour?

He shouted, "Coming!" in a muzzy voice and pulled on a robe and slippers. He shuffled down the hallway, turning on lights as he went. At the door, he squinted through the peephole to find Maya staring glumly back at him.

He undid the chains and dead bolt and yanked the door open. Maya rushed in past him, followed by the dogs and her girlfriend.

She was sheened in sweat, her usually combed hair clinging in clumps to her forehead. She rubbed at her eyes, which were red and lined.

"Pack a bag," she croaked hoarsely.

"What?"

She took him by the shoulders. "Do it," she said.

"Where do you want to...?"

"Mexico, probably. Don't know yet. Pack, dammit." She pushed past him into his bedroom and started yanking open drawers.

"Maya," he said sharply, "I'm not going anywhere until you tell me what's going on."

She glared at him and pushed her hair away from her face. "The Googlecleaner lives. After I cleaned you, I shut it down and walked away. It was too dangerous to use anymore. But it's still set to send me e-mail confirmations whenever it runs. Someone's used it six times to scrub three very specific accounts—all of which happen to belong to members of the Senate Commerce Committee up for reelection."

"Googlers are blackwashing senators?"

"Not Googlers. This is coming from off-site. The IP block is registered in D.C. And the IPs are all used by Gmail users. Guess who the accounts belong to?"

"You spied on Gmail accounts?"

"Okay. Yes. I did look through their e-mail. Everyone does it, now and again, and for a lot worse reasons than I did. But check it out—turns out all this activity is being directed by our lobbying firm. Just doing their job, defending the company's interests."

Greg felt his pulse beating in his temples. "We should tell someone."

"It won't do any good. They know everything about us. They can see every search. Every e-mail. Every time we've been caught on the webcams. Who is in our social network...did you know if you have 15 Orkut buddies, it's statistically certain that you're no more than three steps to someone who's contributed money to a 'terrorist' cause? Remember the airport? You'll be in for a lot more of that."

"Maya," Greg said, getting his bearings. "Isn't heading to Mexico overreacting? Just quit. We can do a start-up or something. This is crazy."

"They came to see me today," she said. "Two of the political officers from DHS. They didn't leave for hours. And they asked me a lot of very heavy questions."

"About the Googlecleaner?"

"About my friends and family. My search history. My personal history."

"Jesus."

"They were sending a message to me. They're watching every click and every search. It's time to go. Time to get out of range."

"There's a Google office in Mexico, you know."

"We've got to go," she said, firmly.

"Laurie, what do you think of this?" Greg asked.

Laurie thumped the dogs between the shoulders. "My parents left East Germany in '65. They used to tell me about the Stasi. The secret police would put everything about you in your file, if you told an unpatriotic joke, whatever. Whether they meant it or not, what Google has created is no different."

"Greg, are you coming?"

He looked at the dogs and shook his head. "I've got some pesos left over," he said. "You take them. Be careful, okay?"

Maya looked like she was going to slug him. Softening, she gave him a ferocious hug.

"Be careful, yourself," she whispered in his ear.

They came for him a week later. At home, in the middle of the night, just as he'd imagined they would.

Two men arrived on his doorstep shortly after 2 a.m. One stood silently by the door. The other was a smiler, short and rumped, in a sport coat with a stain on one lapel and a American flag on the other. "Greg Lupinski, we have reason to believe you're in violation of the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act," he said, by way of introduction. "Specifically, exceeding authorized access, and by means of such conduct having obtained information. Ten years for a first offense. Turns out that what you and your friend did to your Google records qualifies as a felony. And oh, what will come out in the trial...all the stuff you whitewashed out of your profile, for starters."

Greg had played this scene in his head for a week. He'd planned all kinds of brave things to say. It had given him something to do while he waited to hear from Maya. She never called.

"I'd like to get in touch with a lawyer," is all he mustered.

"You can do that," the small man said. "But maybe we can come to a better arrangement."

Greg found his voice. "I'd like to see your badge," he stammered.

The man's basset-hound face lit up as he let out a bemused chuckle. "Buddy, I'm not a cop," he replied. "I'm a consultant. Google hired me—my firm represents their interests in

Washington—to build relationships. Of course, we wouldn't get the police involved without talking to you first. You're part of the family. Actually, there's an offer I'd like to make."

Greg turned to the coffeemaker, dumped the old filter.

"I'll go to the press," he said.

The man nodded as if thinking it over. "Well, sure. You could walk into the Chronicle's office in the morning and spill everything. They'd look for a confirming source. They won't find one. And when they try searching for it, we'll find them. So, buddy, why don't you hear me out, okay? I'm in the win-win business. I'm very good at it." He paused. "By the way, those are excellent beans, but you want to give them a little rinse first? Takes some of the bitterness out and brings up the oils. Here, pass me a colander?"

Greg watched as the man silently took off his jacket and hung it over a kitchen chair, then undid his cuffs and carefully rolled them up, slipping a cheap digital watch into his pocket. He poured the beans out of the grinder and into Greg's colander, and rinsed them in the sink.

He was a little pudgy and very pale, with the social grace of an electrical engineer. He seemed like a real Googler, actually, obsessed with the minutiae. He knew his way around a coffee grinder, too.

"We're drafting a team for Building 49..."

"There is no Building 49," Greg said automatically.

"Of course," the guy said, flashing a tight smile. "There's no Building 49. But we're putting together a team to revamp the Googlecleaner. Maya's code wasn't very efficient, you know. It's full of bugs. We need an upgrade. You'd be the right guy, and it wouldn't matter what you knew if you were back inside."

"Unbelievable," Greg said, laughing. "If you think I'm going to help you smear political candidates in exchange for favors, you're crazier than I thought."

"Greg," the man said, "we're not smearing anyone. We're just going to clean things up a bit. For some select people. You know what I mean? Everyone's Google profile is a little scary under close inspection. Close inspection is the order of the day in politics. Standing for office is like a public colonoscopy." He loaded the cafetière and depressed the plunger, his face screwed up in solemn concentration. Greg retrieved two coffee cups—Google mugs, of course—and passed them over.

"We're going to do for our friends what Maya did for you. Just a little cleanup. All we want to do is preserve their privacy. That's all."

Greg sipped his coffee. "What happens to the candidates you don't clean?"

"Yeah," the guy said, flashing Greg a weak grin. "Yeah, you're right. It'll be kind of tough for them." He searched the inside pocket of his jacket and produced several folded sheets of paper.

He smoothed out the pages and put them on the table. "Here's one of the good guys who needs our help." It was a printout of a search history belonging to a candidate whose campaign Greg had contributed to in the past three elections.

"Fella gets back to his hotel room after a brutal day of campaigning door to door, fires up his laptop, and types 'hot asses' into his search bar. Big deal, right? The way we see it, for that to disqualify a good man from continuing to serve his country is just un-American."

Greg nodded slowly.

"So you'll help the guy out?" the man asked.

"Yes."

"Good. There's one more thing. We need you to help us find Maya. She didn't understand our goals at all, and now she seems to have flown the coop. Once she hears us out, I have no doubt she'll come around."

He glanced at the candidate's search history.

"I guess she might," Greg replied.

The new Congress took 11 working days to pass the Securing and Enumerating America's Communications and Hypertext Act, which authorized the DHS and NSA to outsource up to 80 percent of intelligence and analysis work to private contractors.

Theoretically, the contracts were open to competitive bidding, but within the secure confines of Google's Building 49, there was no question of who would win. If Google had spent \$15 billion on a program to catch bad guys at the border, you can bet they would have caught them—governments just aren't equipped to Do Search Right.

The next morning Greg scrutinized himself carefully as he shaved (the security minders didn't like hacker stubble and weren't shy about telling him so), realizing that today was his first day as a de facto intelligence agent for the U.S. government. How bad would it be? Wasn't it better to have Google doing this stuff than some ham-fisted DHS desk jockey?

By the time he parked at the Googleplex, among the hybrid cars and bulging bike racks, he had convinced himself. He was mulling over which organic smoothie to order at the canteen when his key card failed to open the door to Building 49. The red LED flashed dumbly every time he swiped his card. Any other building, and there'd be someone to tailgate on, people trickling in and out all day. But the Googlers in 49 only emerged for meals, and sometimes not even that.

Swipe, swipe, swipe. Suddenly he heard a voice at his side.

"Greg, can I see you, please?"

The rumped man put an arm around his shoulders, and Greg smelled his citrusy aftershave. It smelled like what his divemaster in Baja had worn when they went out to the bars in the evening. Greg couldn't remember his name. Juan Carlos? Juan Luis?

The man's arm around his shoulders was firm, steering him away from the door, out onto the immaculate lawn, past the herb garden outside the kitchen. "We're giving you a couple of days off," he said.

Greg felt a sudden stab of anxiety. "Why?" Had he done something wrong? Was he going to jail?

"It's Maya." The man turned him around, met his eyes with his bottomless gaze. "She killed herself. In Guatemala. I'm sorry, Greg."

Greg seemed to hurtle away, to a place miles above, a Google Earth view of the Googleplex, where he looked down on himself and the rumped man as a pair of dots, two pixels, tiny and insignificant. He willed himself to tear at his hair, to drop to his knees and weep.

From a long way away, he heard himself say, "I don't need any time off. I'm okay."

From a long way away, he heard the rumped man insist.

The argument persisted for a long time, and then the two pixels moved into Building 49, and the door swung shut behind them.

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