

more harm than I was already resigned to causing, I kept silent, and in my silence I was alone.

I thought that solitude and isolation would be easy for me, or at least easier than it had been for my predecessors in the whistleblowing world. Hadn't each step of my life served as a kind of preparation? Hadn't I gotten used to being alone, after all those years spent hushed and spellbound in front of a screen? I'd been the solo hacker, the night-shift harbor master, the keeper of the keys in an empty office. But I was human, too, and the lack of companionship was hard. Each day was haunted by struggle, as I tried and failed to reconcile the moral and the legal, my duties and my desires. I had everything I'd ever wanted—love, family, and success far beyond what I ever deserved—and I lived in Eden amid plentiful trees, only one of which was forbidden to me. The easiest thing should have been to follow the rules.

And even if I was already reconciled to the dangers of my decision, I wasn't yet adjusted to the role. After all, who was I to put this information in front of the American public? Who'd elected me the president of secrets?

The information I intended to disclose about my country's secret regime of mass surveillance was so explosive, and yet so technical, that I was as scared of being doubted as I was of being misunderstood. That was why my first decision, after resolving to go public, was to go public with documentation. The way to reveal a secret program might have been merely to describe its existence, but the way to reveal programmatic secrecy was to describe its workings. This required documents, the agency's actual files—as many as necessary to expose the scope of the abuse though I knew that disclosing even one PDF would be enough to earn me prison.

The threat of government retribution against any entity or platform to which I made the disclosure led me to briefly consider self-publishing. That would've been the most convenient and safest method: just collecting the documents that best communicated my concerns and posting them online, as they were, then circulating a link. Ultimately, one of my reasons for not pursuing

this course had to do with authentication. Scores of people post “classified secrets” to the Internet every day—many of them about time-travel technologies and aliens. I didn't want my own revelations, which were fairly incredible already, to get lumped in with the outlandish and lost among the crazy.

It was clear to me then, from the earliest stage of the process, that I required, and that the public deserved, some person or institution to vouch for the veracity of the documents. I also wanted a partner to vet the potential hazards posed by the revelation of classified information, and to help explain that information by putting it in technological and legal context. I trusted myself to present the problems with surveillance, and even to analyze them, but I'd have to trust others to solve them. Regardless of how wary of institutions I might have been by this point, I was far wavier of trying to act like one myself. Cooperating with some type of media organization would defend me against the worst accusations of rogue activity, and correct for whatever biases I had, whether they were conscious or unconscious, personal or professional. I didn't want any political opinion of mine to prejudice anything with regard to the presentation, or reception, of the disclosures. After all, in a country in which everyone was being surveilled, no issue was less partisan than surveillance.

In retrospect, I have to credit at least some of my desire to find ideological filters to Lindsay's improving influence. Lindsay had spent years patiently instilling in me the lesson that my interests and concerns weren't always hers, and certainly weren't always the world's, and that just because I shared my knowledge didn't mean that anyone had to share my opinion. Not everybody who was opposed to invasions of privacy might be ready to adopt 256-bit encryption standards or drop off the Internet entirely. An illegal act that disturbed one person as a violation of the Constitution might upset another person as a violation of their privacy, or of that of their spouse or children. Lindsay was my key to unlocking this truth—that diverse motives and approaches can only improve the chances of achieving common goals. She, without even know-