

That conversation had taken place several weeks earlier and two months following his discovery of a back door into what had been deemed a secure, foreign web site. Following that hacking, everything had changed for Michael. He experienced a sudden and profound alteration of his religious views, lost interest in many of his lifelong friends, became more withdrawn and, as his father had suggested, paranoid. Nevertheless, Michael was convinced that his fears were real, not imagined, regardless of the fact that he had no tangible evidence, no means of providing proof. But confirmation was to come, albeit after the fact.

Three weeks following his telephone chat, he arrived home to find his apartment door ajar. Suspecting an intrusion and eager to make certain that his computers were intact, he entered without due caution.

“Close the door and sit down,” an accented voice demanded, the masked man’s right hand pointing a silenced, black pistol at Michael’s torso.

“What do you want?” Michael stammered, a dark stain building in the crotch of his light colored chinos.

“You have been a very bad boy,” the man said, the pistol now aimed at his head.

“What did I do?”

“You know what you did and more importantly, we know what you did.”

“What do you want?”

“I am afraid that what I want is irrelevant but it is what I must do that carries greater importance.”

Michael’s breathing quickened and what was initially the source of a small stain was now sending a steady stream of warm liquid down his leg.

“I have some money,” he stuttered, “if that’s what you want.”

“No, my young friend, it is not.”

Then, suddenly, from the darkened shadows of his bedroom, emerged a second person who approached from behind. With practiced hands, a length of duct tape was pressed across Michael’s lips, effectively sealing them, while his thrashing body was lowered to the cold, wooden floor.

“Hold him down!” the accented voice ordered.

“I’m trying but the kid’s got some strength.”

The man with the accented voice removed a syringe from his inner jacket pocket, shucked off the protective plastic cover using his teeth and with precision inserted the needle into a soft bluish vein that protruded from Michael’s forearm. With a single thrust of the plunger, he injected a life-taking liquid, removed the needle and duct tape and left the apartment with the appearance that it had never been violated.