

or particularly award-winning. Just the minutiae of Aboriginal life. In the world of investigative journalism, we were hardly a threat.

Of course, that was when the *West Wind* still existed. Three days ago, our funding was mysteriously cut. Asbestos was found in our building, which is odd since it was built fifteen years after asbestos was banned. Four of our staff are in jail. Two reporters for possessing four kilos of weapons-grade nuclear fuel, found in a large gutted deer hanging to cure in their backyard. Two other employees for wanting to join ISIS. One-way plane tickets to Turkey were found in their underwear drawers. And one intern is missing. The authorities say they have evidence she was selling government secrets to foreign powers. Strange when you consider she didn't know the difference between Australia and Austria. But the government is never wrong, right? I'm all that's left... And I don't know for how long.

First things first. Four days ago, a package arrived at our office. Sally, our part-time combination reporter/receptionist/IT person—a proud Mohawk woman we were told planned to travel to the Middle East to become a jihadi's bride—dropped it on my desk with a thud.

"It says 'Editor.' I guess that's you." Our job titles were kind of loosey-goosey, and it was Thursday, making me the editor.

The plain, medium-sized package looked so innocuous. Brown wrapping paper, almost like butcher's paper, no label, no return address, just our address in a childish, hurried scrawl. Sally looked on as I removed the packaging. Inside a small cardboard box, I found what appeared to be a broken and crushed dream catcher, with a thumb drive.

"How peculiar," was Sally's reaction.

The mystery was mounting. The reporter in me was intrigued. Mysterious packages from unknown sources didn't usually arrive with a thump on my desk.

"Well, let's take a look" was Sally's suggestion.

Otter Lake is an Ojibway community, but for various reasons, Sally found her way here and became the community Mohawk. There are very few jobs where being nosy, bossy and clever is actually an asset. Working at a small monthly newspaper is one of them. Looking back, it's nearly impossible for me to picture her in a burka, subservient to some overbearing, narrow-minded guy with a rifle, eating hummus and figs. Sally didn't like any of those things. Most Mohawk women wouldn't. Actually, most Native women wouldn't embrace that lifestyle, not for all the bannock in

DREAMS OF DOOM

I know this will make me sound like I'm crazy, but I'm not. At least I hope not. Everything I am about to tell you is true, no matter how crazy it may sound. I can hear them approaching, so I will have to be quick. I don't know how long this will stay online, but hopefully, by God's or whoever you may believe in's grace, these few minutes are enough to get the story out. A few minutes is better than no minutes. Read this as fast as you can. Print it out if possible. Spread the word any way you can.

My name is Pamela Wanishin and I work... used to work... for a small Aboriginal newspaper called the *West Wind*, located in Otter Lake, a small Ojibway community in Central Ontario. We covered the usual political, social and environmental bullshit that happens in First Nations communities and the larger Aboriginal political universe. Nothing extraordinary

the world. But the authorities found incriminating emails and a dress pattern for a burka in her bottom drawer, amid all her sweatpants and thongs. "Okay," I agreed, and plugged the thumb drive into my computer. My first mistake.

It took about three seconds for it to open and the files to download. Wow, I thought. There were a lot of them. All different kinds. Most seemed to be tech files, dealing with harmonics and frequency modulation. Others were schematics of antennas and crystal vibration rates. And then there were the reports on testing and research, many bearing the logo of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. I scanned as quickly as I could, until I heard Sally's voice again.

"Okay, I'm bored." The future enemy of the state stepped outside to have a cigarette.

Our newspaper had already been put to bed, as we say in the business, ready to be sent out to the printers. So I had some spare time to look this stuff over. Everything that popped up on my screen was puzzling. And what was it doing at our newspaper? We had a few discreet stringers who worked for the government, and they were good for the occasional leak or substantiated rumour, but this seemed a little out of our league. Still, I was hooked. I read and read. It was late in the day, and I was happy for something interesting to make the remaining time pass quickly. I was barely conscious of Sally and the rest leaving for the night as I sat there, reading file after file, and then rereading them. Comparing some of the test reports with the anticipated results. Some of these reports were decades old; others were dated just a month ago. Whatever these people were up to, it had been a long time in the planning. But I'm getting ahead of myself... It seemed this was important enough for somebody to steal all these files, most of which were clearly marked "Classified," and then send them to me. But why me? Why the *West Wind*? And what the hell did a trashed dream catcher have to do with anything?

By about ten that night, after I'd gone through just a small portion of the files, the accumulation of information I had so far amassed was beginning to answer a good number of my questions but also to generate quite a few more. And the answers were not pleasant. In fact, they were horrifying.

Finally aware of my growing hunger and the waning hours, I went home, clutching my computer and the thumb drive closely. Above my bed hung a small, unassuming dream catcher that an aunt had given me three years ago when I got my job at the *West Wind*. I set myself up on my bed

with a bowl of day-old hangover soup and some tea, the dream catcher hanging over me as I continued to pore over the files. Each successive file made me increasingly uncomfortable. Looking back and forth from the construction schematics on my screen to the dream catcher over my right shoulder, I was struck by a realization. The dream catcher's circular construction, with the hole in the middle of the lacing, resembled an eye. Not knowing what else to do, and feeling a bit silly, I put the dream catcher in a drawer in the spare room down in the basement.

I live alone now, ever since Larry and I broke up a couple months back, in a house I rent from my uncle. It's kind of small, just the essentials, near the lake and pretty isolated. When you spend all day working in an office and talking with people on the phone or in person, you learn to treasure your alone time. Upon reflection, that may have been a bad decision. Living alone, unfortunately, means living alone, by yourself, nobody else. I was a good quarter-kilometre from anybody else, looking at what I was sure were classified files. Maybe this level of intelligence is why I never rose above middle management.

I fell asleep. Like a bad acid trip, dream catchers of all different sizes and designs paraded through my unconscious mind. I remember several chasing me, dive-bombing me like rabid eagles.

I woke with a start the next morning, my head buried under a pillow for protection. After a brief internal debate, I decided to call Sally and tell her I wasn't feeling well. With the paper already finished for the month, it would be a slow week anyway, and I thought a day finishing up that voluminous list of files might be more productive.

Still in my jammies, I prepared a plate of toast with peanut butter and another cup of tea. I grabbed the notepad I'd been jotting down notes on and began to leaf through it, refreshing my mind and confirming what I had read, not dreamt, the night before.

Looking through the warren of files and charts, one phrase had kept coming up. Project Nightlight. What an odd term. I knew what a night light was. I had one for years as a child after a bat found its way into my bedroom one night. It wouldn't protect me against bats, but at least I would be able to see them coming. But Project Nightlight... What the hell was that? As the reporter's adage dictates, when in doubt, Google. It was a mistake that would come back to haunt me.

I typed the two words into the rectangular box and pressed the return key. The search engine searched. And searched some more. A good twenty

or thirty seconds passed with nothing much happening. I tried again, but now my keyboard seemed uninterested in what my fingertips were telling it. My laptop had frozen. Then, a second later, the screen went dead. Two seconds later, the power in the entire house went down. Three seconds later, my heart was pounding in my chest. Normally I can believe in coincidence, but not that day.

Living in the country, you get used to power failures. I had a supply of candles and flashlights hidden somewhere for just such an emergency. But there were no thunderstorms anywhere in the area. The sun was streaming in through my kitchen window. My first thought—or prayer—was that maybe somebody had hit a hydro pole or something. It had been known to happen. Growing increasingly nervous, I looked out my window and could see Clyde and Shelley's house on the other side of the small bay. I could see their porch light was still on, and so was the flashing marquee at the gas station near the highway, so there was still electricity flowing into the reserve. It seemed only I had no power. I took out my cellphone. "Network unavailable."

Every reporter, whether they work for some supermarket tabloid, a city newspaper or a Native paper, harbours a certain amount of paranoia. It comes with the job. Mine, by now, was no longer "a certain amount." It was raging like teenage hormones on prom night. Over the last ten hours, I had been reading as much as I could cram into my brain. And I had developed a few conspiracy theories about what all that info meant, with the comfort and safety of knowing nothing like that ever really happens. Especially in Otter Lake. Yet another mistake I made.

As I searched my kitchen drawers for a flashlight so that I could go down into the basement to check the breakers, my cellphone blurbled, a sort of half-hearted ring. It glowed, seeming to have a life of its own. Picking it up, I could see an app downloading. By itself. What little I knew about cellphones told me they are not supposed to do that. Finally, it stopped. Download complete. A moment or two passed as I watched the phone, waiting for it to come to life and declare its sentience. Instead, it rang, normally this time. However, the image on the screen indicated it was a Skype call. I didn't have Skype on my phone. But now it seemed I did. What an uncomfortable coincidence.

Very, very hesitantly, I pressed the answer button. One of the few times in my life I hoped it was some telemarketer calling. Standing in the dark of my house, I said hello.

There was no response. No image on the screen either. So much for Skype. Again, I talked to the phone in my hand. "*Almaen*. Is anybody there?" I don't know why I said hello in Ojibway. No Ojibway I know would know how to do anything remotely close to this.

Still no response from my once best friend, now an alien phone, though I thought I could hear the sound of slight movement. Of course, it could have been my imagination. At that point, I think I would not have been surprised if Frankenstein's monster, the Wolf Man, the Terminator and the prime minister of Canada had all poured into my living room. That, I probably could have handled. But this, the not knowing, the mystery—this was pure hell. I do not do creepiness well.

"Okay, I'm hanging up."

"Hold on. One second please. I can't read as fast as I once could."

It was a voice. A man's. Older. Educated. He sounded white and slightly distracted.

I was way too uncomfortable for such a beautiful morning. "Who are you?"

I heard the man clear his throat. "Okay, I think I'm up to speed. My apologies. You took us quite by surprise, and I had to scan a lot of material in a remarkably short period of time. How's the weather out there? It looks like we're expecting a storm by mid-afternoon."

This man seemed to be an awfully polite mystery. Everything about this whole thumb drive incident was throwing me off.

"No clouds." I didn't know what else to say.

"Ms. Wanishin, I believe..."

"How do you know my name?"

"Oh my, that would take far too long to go into. Let's just say... I work for the government. But enough about me, let's talk about you."

I did not want to talk about me. Most definitely I did not want that. Everything was wrong. I was standing in my kitchen, in my jammies, talking to somebody from the government who had managed to hack into my cellphone. Only the day before I had been transcribing audio from the band council meeting, the most hated part of my job. Never thought I'd miss doing that.

I put my phone on speaker and set it down on the counter, beside the empty Shake 'n Bake box from Tuesday's dinner, and backed away. I knew the device itself wasn't the problem, but I still didn't want to be touching it.

"It's about the thumb drive, isn't it?"

There was a small chuckle at the other end. The voice sounded well mannered, even amiable. "Well, I guess even that much must be obvious. Yes, it seems somebody in our department has been very naughty and peed in our Rice Krispies. We believe we know who it is and are in the process of taking steps to deal with the leak, if you'll pardon the pun."

"And what department would that be?" Even under stress, the reporter in me came out.

"Let's just say I work in a special branch of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. You wouldn't know the name. It's rather hush-hush. And please, pick up your phone and hold it properly. I really don't like looking at your ceiling. Especially in the dim light."

Suddenly, the lights in the house came on. Just like that.

"Ms. Wanishin, the cellphone please...?"

If creepiness was like a light, I would have been blind by then. I did as the man asked and picked up my phone, looking directly into its blank screen. My house had never felt more empty or remote.

"That's better. Now I can see you properly."

"I can't see you."

"Well, that's probably for the best. What you don't know can't hurt you, as they say. How I look is unimportant. I am just a nameless and faceless cog in the grinding wheels of bureaucracy. A true minion. Sad but accurate. And as such, the less that is known about me the better. But regarding you, Ms. Wanishin, it seems we have a problem. And by extension, so do you."

I forced out a question. "What department?"

"I'm sorry?"

"What department of Indigenous Affairs do you work for? I know them all."

"Ah, I remember taking philosophy in university and always being startled by the humongous difference between what people think they know and what they actually know. What you don't know, Ms. Wanishin, is far greater than what you do know. Still, I don't suppose there would be a problem in telling you we are an undisclosed, rather unheralded but important branch, kept off the books, you could say. Only a handful of people within the government know of our existence. We work best in the shadows."

At that moment, my life was nothing but shadows. "What's your character? Your mandate?"

Once again, I heard his small chuckle. "My, you are the intrepid little reporter, aren't you? Why should I tell you? I'm sure telling you what little

I already have has bent our rules somewhat. But I like you, Ms. Wanishin, I do. And I am sorry to have put you in this difficult position."

"What difficult position?" I tried to swallow my fear. "I'm in trouble, aren't I?"

This time, I heard the man sigh. An exhalation full of regret and reluctance. I found myself looking out the kitchen window at my lilac-bordered driveway, the outline of my car urging me to run. Shoes, I thought. It might be prudent to put on shoes and grab a coat. I had an uncomfortable feeling about where the rest of this conversation and day were going. I tried to keep the cellphone positioned so that this guy, whoever he was, couldn't tell what I was doing. For that reason, I chose to slip into flats since I didn't have to tie them.

"I am afraid so. Through no fault of your own, you have come to possess some classified information that for the safety of our country cannot be allowed to be disseminated to the public. Obviously, with you being a reporter, there is a conflict there, as I am sure you can see. It, therefore, requires that we take immediate action."

"Project Nightlight, right?"

"Right, Project Nightlight. Those two words will be the final two nails in your coffin, I am sorry to say."

"Literally or metaphorically?"

Once more there was a pause. "Literaphorically. How about that?" Then the man laughed at his own joke. I hate people like that.

"I should not have Googled it. That's how you found me, right?"

"Yes. We have a rather sophisticated search program keeping an eye out for certain words and phrases that may pop up on the internet or in the media. This was a serious red flag. We knew there were a number of classified files that had been surreptitiously downloaded, but why, by whom and for whom... that was still under investigation."

"Are you going to kill me?" I couldn't believe I was in a situation where I had to say those words.

"Let's worry about that tomorrow. Right now..."

"You're coming to get me."

"My dear, we're almost there."

Dropping the phone, I grabbed my computer and the thumb drive. I flung open my front door, departing from the once secure and safe embrace of my home of three years.

"Ms. Wanishin, I really don't think—"

The door closing behind me ended my part of the conversation. Six large running steps across my side patio and driveway and I was opening the door to my car, planning to drive as fast and as desperately as I could in whatever direction offered me the best chance of safety. I had the key in the ignition and my pumping heart in my throat when logic managed to fight its way through my panic.

They—whoever they were—would more than likely be expecting a car chase. How else but by road would they be getting here? I didn't like where this was taking me. I couldn't drive my way to safety. I had to use Plan B, except I didn't have a Plan B. Small-time reporters from obscure First Nations don't often have need of a Plan B.

I was dangerously close to hyperventilating when I realized I might actually be in possession of a Plan B. Getting out of the car, I ran down to the lake and along the shoreline. My cousin Walter had a motorboat stored at a dock five minutes away, or one minute at full gallop.

Every step I took along the lakeshore, I was sure somebody would leap out of the bulrushes and tackle me. Instead, I startled about half a dozen creatures that had settled down in the bushes for a lazy summer afternoon. My shoes had half filled with sand and water before I finally found the boat. Luckily, Walter always left it with a full tank of gas. Another fifty metres farther along the water's edge, I could see his house, with his three kids playing on the deck, unaware of the evil in the world. I envied them.

I leaped into his boat. He'd upgraded his boating preferences since I'd last gone out with him a few years back. And it had been a few more years since I had personally operated a vessel designed to travel through water, but I still remembered the fundamentals. When I was a teenager, I'd worked with my uncle as a fishing guide. I was pretty sure the technology of nautical travel hadn't changed substantially. I primed the engine, pushed the right button and roared out into the wide embrace of Otter Lake.

As I travelled deeper into the islands that peppered this side of the lake, I looked over my shoulder. From halfway across the water, I could see cars, maybe four or five, converging on my house from both sides. I knew they could hear the boat—sound travels amazingly well across calm water—but a variety of boats could be seen scattered across the lake, all moving in different directions.

Still dressed in my pyjamas, flats and raincoat, I made my way through the islands, navigating from memory. I was looking for Joshua Red's cabin.

He was a friend of the family about my age who loved to get away from the hustle and bustle of reserve life by retreating to a small island where his family had built a cabin. He'd been in a car accident several months ago and was still recovering. I knew the cabin was empty and where it was located. More importantly, it was off the grid. Electricity over here was only a theory. Off the grid was good. Off the grid was necessary. Off the grid gave me time to figure things out.

There were cottages and cabins strewn throughout the dozen or so islands, so it would take them time to connect the dots and find me. Hopefully, I would have a Plan C by then.

As I expected, the cabin looked empty but at the same time welcoming. I hid the boat behind a patch of bulrushes and went in. I hadn't been there in a few years, but as far as I could tell, nothing had changed. The winds of fashion and renovation don't often blow across the watery expanse of Otter Lake. Once I had closed the door behind me, I slid to the floor. My fast breathing was making me nauseous, and it quickly gave way to sobbing. I couldn't believe what was happening to me. Pamela Wanishin, fugitive. Movies about dogged reporters flashed across my consciousness, albeit with an Aboriginal flavour: *All the Prime Minister's Men*, *Ojibway Holiday*, *The Blue Heron Brief*, *The Girl with the Orca Tattoo*. Maybe I was having a psychotic episode.

Struggling to get up off the floor, I noticed a dream catcher hanging in the window. There was another one against the far wall. Knowing they were somehow tied into this whole mess, I tore them down and ripped them apart. I would apologize to Joshua later... I hoped.

There were still a lot of documents left to go through. At the moment, I was safe and I had three, maybe three-and-a-half hours of power left on my computer. All good wars need weapons and a battle plan. I had a feeling they existed somewhere in those electronic files. The day stretched on as I read, my little corner of the cabin lit only by the flickering screen of my computer. The sun and my computer's battery gave out about the same time. I sat in darkness for the longest time, putting all the pieces together, or trying to.

My head rested sideways on the Formica table, deep in a troubled sleep, until the early morning sun decided it was safe to make an appearance. For the second morning in a row, I awoke with a jerk. Long hours of contemplation had helped me figure it all out before sheer exhaustion gave me a few hours of solace. One document led to another, which explained

a third, which confirmed a fourth and made sense of a fifth. The whole thing was huge... we're talking national media huge.

But first it was morning, and with all the excitement and exertion I was now hungry. The ever wise and prepared Joshua had several cans of soup and stew on his shelves, probably several years old. Not my normal morning yogurt and berries, but these were not normal times. I mulled my options over as I forced down some lukewarm beef stew and dreadful instant coffee. It was all so bizarre. Obviously I had to get this thumb drive and all its information to somebody with more resources than a cabin on an island stocked with canned food older than my shoes. I should have gone into nursing like my mother had wanted.

For the rest of that day I held the thumb drive close in my hand, pondering how such a tiny, innocuous device could have such vicious consequences. I watched boats pass by the island, convinced the occupants were scanning the treed canopy for a thirty-year-old Ojibway reporter who, through no effort of her own, had fucked up her life and had no idea how to repair it. Across the calm waters I could see the community of Otter Lake, the thin treeline in the hazy distance. What was going on there, I found myself wondering.

Those were the longest and loneliest two days of my life. I lived off two cans of ravioli, one box of uncooked Kraft Dinner and what I think was a granola bar. Every moment, I expected government officials to jump out of the poison ivy or leap up from the water lilies. With only my own paranoia as company, I was pretty miserable. Add to that the fact that I was alone and confused, and I didn't know what to do. Sleep came at the end of each day, offering refuge but providing only nightmares.

On these islands, there are a lot of birds. Especially crows. They nest all up and down the islands, but during the day they fly over to the community of Otter Lake to look for food, the local garbage dump being the avian restaurant of choice. Early on my third morning at Joshua's cabin, the crows should have been just waking up. Instead, they were already loud and complaining. Complaining about what? Crows don't have many natural enemies, except humans. Seemed we had that in common.

It was around that time that I heard a faint humming, which was gradually growing stronger, and closer. Like a hummingbird on steroids. Looking out the window, at first I couldn't see anything. Then, just above a bunch of sumac trees, I saw some movement. It seemed to flutter and dodge through the thick foliage. I knew what it was instantly. I'd seen them

on television, and once, in town, some kid was playing with one in a park. It was one of those drones. It seemed to be sweeping through the woods, looking for something. Looking for me.

"Shit," I muttered.

For a brief moment the morning before, I had hoped I was overreacting, that this situation I found myself in wasn't as dangerous as I had thought. But what was slowly moving toward the cabin was definitely not some rich kid's toy. Even from this distance I could tell it was all decked out with instrumentation and things I couldn't even begin to identify. How had it found me, alone on a small island kilometres away from where I was supposed to be? Nevertheless, it was time to go—again.

I left the computer behind and grabbed the thumb drive. I opened the front door, ready to make a dash for the boat... then I realized there wasn't much point. That thing could fly faster than I could run, and faster than a twenty-year-old boat and a twelve-horsepower motor could travel. I backed into the cabin, trying desperately to figure things out. The humming was louder now, practically overhead. Cautiously, I looked out the only window that had a bare approximation of curtains, actually moth-eaten dish towels. I couldn't see the drone, but through the pathway to the dock I could see an island about a half-kilometre to the east. And I was pretty sure I could see another drone over there. Evidently, they were combing all the nearby islands. This was not good. This was way above this Native reporter's pay grade.

I could hear the drone circling the cabin. I also heard a floorboard creak beneath my foot. Joshua suddenly became my favourite family friend for the second time. For "emergencies," as he called them, the man often kept a rifle hidden under the floorboards. Just a .22 but enough to scare off hungry but skittish bears and coyotes. He had shown it to me once, when we were celebrating his twenty-fifth birthday. Moving quickly, I pulled it and a box of shells out from their hiding spot under the floor. I loaded it clumsily—twice I dropped the shells—and charged through the door, turning around as I cleared the roof. Instantly I could see it, turning to face me. I lifted the gun, aimed, pulled the trigger and stepped backwards, reacting to the recoil. I had missed.

Putting another shell in, I took my time. The drone began to rise, as if sensing the danger. Taking a deep breath, I squeezed the trigger, this time anticipating the recoil. As if God were answering a prayer for the first time in my life, I saw the back left horizontal blades fly apart. It dipped

to the right, trying to compensate, but with little luck. In front of it was a rather large cedar tree that proved to be substantially more obstinate than the drone. No more drone.

Strangely, I did not feel elated. I knew I had only bought myself a few minutes, maybe ten at best. It had seen me. But again, I had to ask myself, how had it found me? And how had it known someone was in the cabin? Then the answer came to me—thermal imaging. Environment Canada often used the same thing to check out deer populations in densely forested regions. I was the warmest thing on the island. And the largest. That thing, even in its dozen pieces, looked like it had every possible surveillance toy on it. It was enough to make my little nephew Evan, who loved all those realistic war video games, wet his pants. But how do you fight thermal imaging?

Camouflage! If my body heat stood out so noticeably on this deserted island, then give it something else to look at... or hide behind something hotter. Dropping the rifle, I began to put my plan into effect as quickly as a handful of dry crackers and one cup of black instant coffee would allow me. I'd lost track of whether this was Plan C or D, but so far I was alive, so I decided not to break the chain of theoretical backup plans. I grabbed some of my cousin's kerosene lamps and a quarter jug of gas he had stored under the awning beside the door, and doused the cabin and nearby trees. I hated what I was doing. Joshua would also hate what I was doing. This went against everything I believed in. I had spent many happy days swimming and playing here as a kid, but what else could I do? Taking most of the gas from the spare tank in the boat, I soaked some of the trees close to it. Already I could hear more drones approaching, their buzz slightly louder than bees.

Taking a deep breath, I ignited a barbecue lighter I'd found in the cabin. Handy little things—darn clever, those white people. I saw a drone coming toward me over the sumac bushes as I lit the trail of gas. For the longest moment in the world, I was sure something was wrong, because there was no corresponding whoosh of several gallons of gasoline bursting into flames. Maybe the ground and trees were too wet from morning dew. Maybe I didn't know as much about setting an island on fire as I'd thought.

Then suddenly, the path and the bushes alongside it erupted in flames. Running like a dog after a cat, the fire raced up the path and then attacked the cabin and surrounding forest. Almost instantly, the island was on

fire. And I was still standing on it. Quickly I got into my boat as the new drone moved closer, hovering almost directly over a group of dry bushes I'd drenched just a few moments earlier. Behind it I saw the fire racing down from the cabin along the other side of the path until it was directly under the drone. A sudden whoosh of flames and the drone, blind and damaged, crashed into the water not more than three feet from my boat. By the time I was a kilometre offshore, the whole island was ablaze.

I was sure I could see two other drones circling the island, dodging back and forth. At first I was afraid they'd spot me out on the still water of the lake, but by then, with all the early morning fishermen plying their trade, people fleeing nearby islands and billowing smoke creating an amazingly effective smokescreen, I was effectively lost in the confusion. It looked like I would live to fight another day.

By the time I pulled up onshore at Otter Lake, I knew what I needed to do—sort of. First of all, I needed help. So far, God, the Creator, Lady Fortune or random chance had taken a shine to me, but I knew that without other forms of help, I would not continue to be so lucky. Leaving the boat, I made my way through the village, waving casually to people emerging from their houses to see the burning island across the bay. Passing two friends, Mike and Charlie who worked at the gas bar, I noticed them looking at me curiously. It was then I became acutely aware that I was still dressed in my soggy pyjamas, slip-on shoes and a raincoat, smelling like gasoline and three days on an isolated island. By this point, I didn't give a shit.

My nephew Todd from the snack shack drove by. He waved to me. I saw his car had a dream catcher hanging from its rear-view mirror, as did the three cars that followed his. I passed my Aunt Julia's house. I saw a large dream catcher in the window. The elementary school had a big one painted on its side. The conspiracy, right under my nose, was enormous. More cars passed with more dream catchers clearly visible.

The dampness of the morning, the trip across the lake and perhaps a certain level of shock were making me shiver on Sally's doorstep. It took a moment for her to answer the door.

"Pamela, where the hell have you been?! Do you know what's been going on around here? We've all been... Ho-ly! What happened to you?" Dressed for work, she looked good, unlike me. "Is something wrong?" "Can I come in? I need help."

She stepped aside and held the door open for me. Once I was in her house, I felt a certain amount of relief. I flinched, hearing a buzzing, before realizing it was her old refrigerator.

Sally pulled out a chair for me and I gratefully sat down.

Her hospitality gene kicking in, she poured me a cup of coffee. "Did you see the fire across the bay? Isn't that Joshua's island? Is he okay?"

The cup she gave me had the Iroquois two-row wampum sign on it. "Yeah, he's fi—"

Her cup had a dream catcher design on its side. Dangling over the kitchen sink was yet another.

"Shit," I muttered.

It felt like I was surrounded. With one hand, I grabbed her coffee mug; with the other, I tore the dream catcher from its mounting and threw them both out the door.

"What the hell? My mother gave me that!"

"Listen to me, Sally. Remember that thumb drive I got on Thursday? My God, was that just a few days ago?"

"That was my favourite mug, too."

"Pay attention. Dream catchers are evil. Part of a government plot to control Native people."

For a few seconds, the only sound in the kitchen was the ticking of the clock above the doorway to the living room.

"Huh?"

"Okay, stay with me. I've just spent the last couple of days plowing through all the information on that thing. I know this is going to sound weird, but it all makes sense. Okay, now follow me. Dream catchers are almost always made with a metal hoop, right? With intricate interlaced threading or wiring extending inwards. And on those threads are usually beads or crystals—"

"I know what a dream catcher looks like."

I could see I was losing her.

"Do you? Do you really? Think about it. What does that sound like? A metal hoop. Wiring. Crystals?"

A frustrated shrug told me I had lost her.

"An antenna! Or even a satellite dish. A lot of the stuff I read in those files was way over my head, but some secret branch of Indigenous Affairs has spent the last twenty-five years developing the technology and dispersing it among Canada's Native population."

More ticking from the clock, and I heard her refrigerator come on again.

"Have you been out on some sort of binge? I mean, you show up here in your pyjamas and raincoat, smelling of gas, looking like you haven't slept for a while, talking about a dream catcher conspiracy to control Canada's Indigenous people. That's a little unusual."

"Under normal circumstances, maybe."

Digging deep in my raincoat pocket, I removed the thumb drive and thrust it tightly into her hand. She looked at it for a second, growing oddly calm. The thin summer scarf she'd been wearing slipped down to reveal a necklace I'd never seen before. Nestled between her collarbones was a delicate gold dream catcher. Sally tucked some of her long black hair behind her right ear. She had matching earrings.

"Those are new." I managed to say.

Speaking in a monotone, she answered, "They came yesterday. Courier. From my mother in Tyendinaga. Very pretty, don't you think?"

"I think they're beautiful. Don't you, Pamela?"

Now I heard the voice that had forced its way into my life just a few evenings ago, this time coming from her table. Her iPad was on and pointed at me. Once again, Skype was activated but there was no return picture.

"Here we were, trying to figure out how to find you and you just show up. It's always hard to anticipate the benefits of luck. We were just planting a suggestion in Sally here, just in case you decided to contact her."

I didn't say anything. I could feel my options quickly slipping away. And the voice just kept talking, so calm and confident.

"You're quite clever, young lady. I will give you that. We've found the gentleman who sent you the thumb drive. Evidently, he was infatuated with both you and your writing. I believe you met him at a political conference some months ago, but the less said about him the better. The here and now is always more interesting than the then and there, don't you agree?"

"Speaking from an Aboriginal perspective, not always." I had finally found my voice.

"Touché, Ms. Wanishin. I stand corrected."

"Was I right?"

The blank screen looked back at me. "About the dream catchers? It's a lot more complicated than that, but I believe you got the gist."

"But why? I assume a lot of time and money went into this... this... I couldn't find the right word."

"Ah yes, it was inevitable you would ask that. Suppression of Indigenous unrest, young lady. Both urban and rural. Our best scientists designed today's dream catchers as a sort of pacification protocol. We initiated it to help keep the Aboriginal population less... volatile. Simply put, dream catchers, whether they are on walls, windows, rear-view mirrors or jewelry, act as receivers for—let's call them radio waves for the moment, to help eliminate, or at least moderate, the more radical and detrimental social outbursts that on occasion have plagued our country. Truly, we just want our Native people to be happy. And protesting First Nations are not happy people, which in turn aggravates other segments of the population. You see, it's for your own good."

I found myself leaning against the kitchen sink, struggling to talk. "When? How?"

"You look a little perturbed, Ms. Wanishin. Perhaps you should sit down."

I sat down on a kitchen chair with a thump.

"I don't... This is... You can't..."

I looked at Sally, but she hadn't moved. She was still looking down, her gaze unnaturally fixed on the thumb drive in her hand.

"Yes, I realize this is all rather overwhelming. When I first took over this portfolio, I was amazed. You might be surprised to know this was originally put into development right after the rejection of the infamous White Paper. My predecessors could read the writing on the wall, even back then. What with the growing power of the civil rights movement in America, it would only be a matter of time before the same unrest moved north to our little hamlet of freedom. Except, we correctly surmised, it would come from the Native community. We decided to be a little more proactive and discreet than our southern neighbours. Americans can be so over the top, don't you think?"

I thought about the first Trudeau era and the government's attempt to renegotiate the special status of Native people and reserves, basically aiming to politically eliminate us out of any meaningful Canadian existence. "The White Paper... That was over forty-five years ago!"

"Oh good, you remember your history. Yes, but it was the Oka Crisis that began Project Nightlight. The gradual infiltration of the First Nations community via specially designed dream catchers. That's the beauty of the whole situation. Dream catchers were already becoming all the rage. All we had to do was replace them with our own specially designed ones. You see, we currently have 143 Native women across the country un-

knowingly pumping out all different variations, sizes, makes and designs of our special dream catchers. We supply them with the proper material and those women alone, specially conditioned by us, supply the vast majority of powwow traders, arts and crafts stores and conference vendors, making saturation of the market total and complete. Of course, there are a few made here and there by random entrepreneurs, children or therapy groups, but they are just a small percentage. The whole operation is remarkably effective."

I tried to stop myself from hyperventilating. He was telling me everything, but why? Because I was trapped and he was amusing himself. If I could have remembered the Lord's Prayer, I would have been saying it then.

"You'll notice that since Oka and Ipperwash, other than a few flare-ups here and there, things have been relatively quiet. The Idle No More movement was reasonably calm and non-invasive. The Native population, though still vocal and opinionated, has become largely non-violent. Add to that a few apologies here, a royal commission there... and the Canadian government and public shuffle along, dealing with the more important issues of the day. See, a much better, regulated society. And the real beauty of the plan is, for the most part, only those within the target population would want or have dream catchers, and they then voluntarily pass them on to those outside their immediate cultural environments who share similar political and social views. Meaning, of course, that non-Native sympathizers who would be likely to march or protest alongside their Indigenous brothers and sisters are frequently given dream catchers by their Native friends, thus completing the saturation. Brilliant, wouldn't you say? We're very proud."

I looked at the docile Sally and wondered if that was my fate.

"Obviously, your friend needed a rather large dose to ensure her immediate compliance. But as I am sure you would agree, the general Aboriginal population is not even aware that they are being socially massaged. Well, that's how I like to refer to it."

"Socially massaged... How long do I have?"

"For what?"

"Until you socially massage the hell out of me? Or you kill me?"

The man at the other end of the conversation laughed. "My dear Ms. Wanishin, we are not going to kill you. That would be too... American."

"So what are you going to do with me, then? This is not an 'agree to disagree' situation."

He laughed again. "Quite right. You will simply be... removed. To a more secure location for containment. To ensure the continuing calm of Canadian society, you understand. We have a wonderful facility located on Ellesmere Island. You will love it there."

"And Sally? What will happen to her?"

That's when I learned about the decision made by Otter Lake's resident proud Mohawk to move to the other side of the world and humbly embrace a violently patriarchal system.

"I love the irony," the voice commented. "I'm big on irony." Almost gleefully, he told me about his plans for the others at the paper and for the *West Wind* itself. "It's called 'containment and cleanup.' It will be a bit messy, but we can make it work. We have before. These little scenarios are how I exercise my creativity. I know you're not really in a position to appreciate the solution, but maybe someday you'll grow to be amused."

My mind was tap dancing. I have always believed that every problem has a solution. Somewhere in the back of my overtaxed mind, a dim but possible plan was beginning to form. But would I have time?

"I assume you've already got Sally's house surrounded and are ready to move in."

"I wouldn't be very efficient at my job if my people weren't in place already."

"Will you give me a chance to sing my death song?"

Silence. In the quietness, I could almost hear the man's puzzlement. It only lasted a second.

"Death song? The Ojibway don't have a death song. And as I said, you aren't going to be killed."

"I misspoke. I meant my removal song."

I don't know where that idea came from, but I assumed that somebody who was used to being in control, and arrogant, probably had a shallow understanding of Native culture and thought of himself as sympathetic and respectful—in his own way. Also, it might appeal to his penchant for irony.

This time, there were two seconds of silence. I could sense the man's control of the situation flickering, just a bit. "Removal song? Again, the Ojibway—"

Now was my chance.

"Yes, we do. Reserves, residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, prison—we are being removed all the time. It's become part of our contemporary

culture. Necessity and tradition dictated that we develop a removal song. Please allow me the cultural consideration to—"

"I am sorry, but we cannot—"

"Then I will burn this house down, thereby causing as much chaos and drawing as much attention as possible, a condition I am sure people in your position hate. I've burned an island to the ground; a house would be a lot easier. What do you say to that, mysterious white guy? All I need is ten minutes. Oh look, lighter fluid..."

If silence could be angry, I thought, his would be screaming. Each second passed with agonizing slowness. I looked out Sally's window and couldn't see anything, but I knew, sure as my ex-boyfriend owes me \$1,400, they were there.

"Ten minutes... for your removal song."

I grabbed the iPad on the table and quickly disabled the internet. Then I made sure Sally's cellphone was turned off. To be safe, I took the battery out.

The cool thing about Sally is she did triple duty at the paper—receptionist, IT person and reporter. First thing I did, on the off chance the house was bugged, was start chanting. Random noises and vocalizations. Second thing was I grabbed Sally's voice recorder and turned it on. As accurately as possible, I have recounted everything that has happened to me since hell arrived in a small paper package. Luckily, she also had one of those programs that converts voice to text. Hopefully, that is what you are reading now.

As a small business operating out in the country, the paper often had its own unique difficulties to deal with. Power surges, thunderstorms, spontaneous blackouts that could severely affect internet and phone reception. So Sally, in all her wisdom, saw fit to connect the *West Wind* office to her own house about forty metres down the road with a hard line to ensure none of these problems would interfere with getting the paper out. Being the smart woman she is... or was, Sally even got a grant to pay for it. This meant her server was connected to the server at the paper, with no way for the mysterious white guy to listen in or monitor, unless he physically tapped into the actual cable. He was working on the fly just as much as I was.

The beauty of the situation is I will upload my story and the thumb drive files onto Sally's server, which will immediately send them to the server at the office—with its huge mailing list, website and contact files. As Sally, who is still sitting at the kitchen table looking blankly down at

her now-empty hand, explained to me once, if there is a break in power or connection at her end, whatever is loaded on the office's server will automatically be emailed wherever it has been pre-programmed to go. Or from here, if necessary, as a backup. The second they storm this house, I assume they will grab Sally's hard drive in an attempt to secure the evidence. And the minute they disconnect the server I am about to plug the thumb drive into, everything I have just recorded will go international and they'll be fucked. I, too, love irony.

So this is my story. Tell everybody. Do not trust dream catchers, especially ones made from metal hoops, wire and plastic string and beads. They are evil. They are destroying the Native people. Rip them from cars, windows and walls, necklaces and earrings, crush or burn them, wherever you see them. This is the only warning you will get. Fight the dream catcher!

What will happen to me, I don't know... I've always wanted to go to Nunavut, but not—

Oh shit, gotta go...

MR. GIZMO

In a small community, on a tiny island on the edge of a huge ocean, sat a boy. He was not a small boy, nor was he a large boy. He was a medium-sized teenager, fast approaching the beginning of his third decade on Turtle Island but feeling the weight of a thousand years upon his shoulders. In his unremarkable room, he sat on the edge of his unmade bed. Around him was the detritus he had so far acquired in his unmemorable life—a mishmash of outgrown toys, casually read graphic novels, rudely piled clothes—and he held a small .38 snub-nosed revolver firmly in his hand.

The house was empty and quiet. Only the sounds of the island's animal citizens could occasionally be heard filtering into the room from the world outside. Squeezing the wooden handle, the boy could feel the criss-crossed texture of the gun's grip. Lying dead centre in his palm, it