

I've been living in the forest for a while now.

I can't remember what things were like before. No, that's not true – I have to admit I remember a little. There was always noise and firelight; the smell of powder that lingered on my tongue, my lips. There were always worries, duties that to be done. I was still an infant, but I knew the adults were always busy, always thinking about their standing in the world, their relations with each other, their constant need for progress.

There are still worries now, but they are different.

The forest is all around me. I know how to live here; I know what I need to do to survive. There are no expectations. I grow, I feed myself, I live here with all the other beings of the earth, and that's it. We all share this home – we all must respect each other.

But this is still the beginning. Some of my neighbours think I'm like the others, the ones who carry guns and want to destroy the forest. But I am not like those people. I have to make them understand that. I can learn to find my way around the forest, just the way they do it: silent feet, arms that grasp the trees, stronger by the day. I can wash myself in the streams and take my meals from the thickets; I can pay my respects to our ancestors in the way those people have forgotten. And to the animal spirits of the forest, the ones the rest of them never even knew about.

And Mother is here. She can protect me. To begin with, we feared each other, but soon we saw this was a mistake. Un-

der her protection, I am respected. I don't look like her other children – I mean to say, I don't yet resemble my own siblings. But it will take time: I am still growing and changing, still developing. It's because I'm still a child. When I'm an adult, I'll be just like them.

And it's starting: it must be. Because each time I see my reflection in the rivers, it looks more and more unfamiliar. Just a little girl, with thin and fragile bones – that isn't me. I am strong: I can make my way right across the forest without touching the ground once. Just a little girl, so fearful, round-eyed – that isn't me. I know all the forest's traps now; I know when I need to be intimidating. I am an animal, a four-legged beast; that's not what I look like. It's not something I want to see.

Each time I come across it, this lie of an image, I plunge my hands into the water and shake them until the picture is gone, distorted into fragments. That isn't me. I am my mother's daughter, a forest creature. I have cut all ties I ever had with humanity – I am nothing like them. I am a wolf.