I live in a forest so there is no way I can tell you this story without the trees listening in. I live in a forest and it gets dark here. You can see stars and planets clearly through the tree branches in the winter nights. In the summer the leaves are the sky and the fireflies glisten against it.

Neither can I tell you this story without the stars and planets listening in. There is nothing between us right now but a few miles of atmosphere, and then a place where even the molecules are spaced so far apart it makes silence on earth sound like a roaring ocean.

So you know they hear every whisper. The trees are breathing for me right now and benignly growing in rings like springs spiraling up their stems; they literally spring from the earth.

Bend one. Bend a sapling and see it fly back. Cut a tree for wood and watch it spring towards you as it falls. Look at the end of a twig cut open and see the spirals of the solar system, of the atmosphere of the sun, in rings.

I say they can hear me, but of course, with only a molecule every square yard, as I said, there is no sound. What they hear from me and me from them is something else. Why when I first saw Jupiter through a telescope did I say “hello friend?” Jupiter is a gas giant, a giant ball of gas with a red spot storm that rages for centuries. Jupiter and I have so little in common, it might seem, and yet: “Hello Friend.”

Then, as a cure for loneliness we find out that indeed Jupiter and I share an atmosphere. We are in the same place, in the atmosphere of the unnamed sun.

And, at a certain level of creation, way down among the protons and neutrons, there are particles of matter that are indistinguishable from one another. In other words, we are all made of the same stuff. Not just “we” but the Royal “We.”

That sapling, the snow, a bluejay, the seeds she’s eating. A window, a rock, water, and of course, Jupiter.

Oh this is no accident of design. This is the answer to so many questions.

I have questions for the stars. They hear and do not hear when I look at them and say “How are you a billion light years away? You, and you, Betelgeuse, when will you go supernova, or have you already and we don’t know? How can you be so far away it takes light six hundred or so years to get to you or from you? And why, Andromeda, when I look at you through binoculars do I feel I’m looking into a mirror? We’re the same kind of galaxy, we’re twins, we’re cousins. You do understand that while you burn and arch overhead in a river of opalescent light that we humans prey on each other and the whole planet down here, you do know that, or you don’t, but how can you be so huge and grand and beautiful with us down here cocking the whole thing up?” I yell at the stars and planets because I love them and I want them to know.

That’s also how I know the universe doesn’t just exist for humans. The light and magnetism of the planets and the sun and stars exists for everything. The rocks sing in harmonies with it, tadpoles face the solar wind, the animals feel our connection and it isn’t the first time a human stared at the atom and said “there’s so much power in there.” Only lately did a human say “ee equals em cee squared and POW.”

Why POW? The stars just shrug. They do it all day. The people who knew before, knew how to take care of one another. If we took care of one another, ee equals em cee squared would mean quite another thing.
I pretend I am alone in the forest and alone shouting at the stars but there is a connection I cannot even feel. My senses make more sense in dreams. I have never lost the ability to feel what is really there in dreams. I think everyone dreams. I think the universe is dreaming us and we are cocking it up but we have done that before. I think if we cared for one another everything that now means something would mean something else.

Dream one: there is a tidal wave above the houses. I have a special camera to take a picture of it, to bear witness. I take the picture, I hide the film. The tidal wave is made of tears.

We think that we can understand the magnitude of a thing. But we can’t. Right now there are fetuses floating in blood nectar in warm wombs everywhere. They are deer and mice, dogs, goats and humans, floating in wombs which are nestled among entrails which walk through the world which is a living ball floating through space which is in the atmosphere of a living burning ball of nuclear blasts—fission and fusion—of a sea of hydrogen, balls floating through almost nothing with a molecule every square meter, now every square mile. The moon floats up to have a look, and sees the red seas of wombs floating with wolves and moose and caribou and bears.

Into this miracle we peer and think we can understand with science, with reason. Without reason we can understand. Just listen. You are small, very small in all of this. A tidal wave of tears is coming to wash the world shores. If we cared for one another the tears would stop flowing.

We think that we can control things. We are very small. We have already seen cultures that knew about the stars. We already know that the animals know more than we do. The birds fly up to escape the heat, the birds fly down because spring comes early. All over the world things are changing, all over the world the people fly across the desert, across the water, they flee and they become molecules closely packed together like the surface of the sun. We think we can control the birds, the people, the water, and these are things we don’t even hear and understand in our own ear canals: we have not heard the voice of the water, the sun, the desert, not even the birds, who tell us so clearly in the most beautiful language what it is we need to know.

When we care for one another, we are making a new world.

Dream two: There are tornadoes everywhere in the dark sky. Lightning flashes. Then jets are overhead, they are dropping sheets of ice, icicles and glaciers rain from the sky.

Betelgeuse is from the Arabic word. The people here have their own word for the massive red and dying star. I say “dying” but nothing at all ever dies in the universe. When the Europeans flooded onto Turtle Island they made laws that outlawed language. Why did they do that? How did they know to even do that?

What did they know about the people crying out to the trees and to the stars?

I yell at the stars: “this miracle of creation is far too amazing to even comprehend, and you’ve left us here scrabbling in the dust, we act like we’re starving for life, we act like we are not swaddled for all time in this nest of swirling beauty.” And sometimes, I won’t lie, I drink and cry under the backbone of the night, the spilled milk, the path so many have trod.

In Six-Hundred-and-Forty-Two-point-Five light years, maybe Betelgeuse will answer me. It will only be two and a half million light years before Andromeda gets my message.

There’s no word in English for that excitement you feel when someone receives your package in the mail. I know I feel comfort talking to the stars and planets because they are my family. I am made of the same stuff as Jupiter, and in the future, when the solar system of planets squishes back together, I will be Jupiter and Jupiter will be me. The future is so long, I like to imagine time the way the earth imagines time. Whatever I can imagine, the earth has already done. This forest sprang from dirt made by the grinding of rocks under one kilometer of ice. I look up: a kilometer of
ice once was here above me, above the forest, above the fireflies and the grosbeaks and the chickadees. The Cree word for chickadee sounds like the call of a chickadee. Lots of birds speak Cree around here.

_Oho_, says the owl.

They banished language because somehow they knew that we must talk to the universe, and that the universe remembers us in our own language. And they knew that if we sent packages to the planets and stars, maybe they would get lost and we would never know the joy of them receiving, of Andromeda laughing at our jokes, at Saturn looking pensive when we call her beautiful. We need the yellow planet to hear us, we need the owls and chickadees to hear us. A raven cocks her head at me from overhead. She sees me and I know the people here have been killing ravens. Not for long, but for long enough.

And that’s what I know, the earth is so huge, and in the universe the earth is a mote of dust that lives upon dust. So time is forever. Time is a circle, not a line, and everything comes back. Nothing can end, nothing ends; under a kilometer of ice, life waits and sleeps. Under violence and chaos love sleeps.

When we care for ourselves the world lives on. If we never learn to care for ourselves, the world will live on. It takes nothing from the gift if it gets lost in the post. The universe still vibrates with joy at the giving.

And I do think, from what the trees tell me, that all the language floating upwards at the speed of sound will eventually find its source, in the planets and stars, because with us all being exactly the same stuff, deep down, the honeycomb nature of the universe demands that the stuff communicates across time and space, from the place where it is a foam to the place at the edge of the universe where it is a foam of space mixed with time and time interfolded into space.

All of these words are heard, and the metaphors we cry: “red is from blood, blue is from water, yellow is the color of the dead grass.”

Every word refers back to reality, to particles made into molecules made into matter, made into skin and blood and fur and eyeballs, just looking at the stars they see us with our own eyes, a perfect looking glass of perfection.

The forbidden languages are coming back. Children rush forth from nests of blood to speak to the stars on our behalf. I know their breath says they are hungry for life but not anymore starving, for we will learn to care for ourselves in the way that my horse breathes liters of hot breath into my face when I lean down to talk to her. Her breath freezes on my cheek then turns to water, then to mist and travels up smelling of human and horse together, then rains down some day long into the future in another continent.

So how can we understand when we don’t even know where the gift of language came from, and how it arrived unscathed from somewhere, and how we don’t even know where we were when the boundaries of the sea were drawn, when the boundaries of the glaciers receded, when the fringe of the edge of the expanding universe was shaken out like a carpet? How can we know, I ask the stars, “what do we really know?”

Dream three: Two women are meeting in the desert. One is very small, they both wear water colored skirts and kerchiefs the colors of blood on dead grass. One of them looks at me with a look of pity.

I feel good because she saw me. Then the small woman gives the other woman something and laughs. They both laugh, they are very old and laughing. Tears gather at the corners of their eyes.

Then the small woman turns and walks into a hole in the desert and disappears underground.

Overhead, Betelgeuse seems to pulse a little.