

corridors of the school. I have a vivid memory of a frieze of gold and silver spray-painted coffee beans, arranged to form the spirals of a galaxy on a huge sheet of black paper. It must have been many pieces of paper, stapled together. I forget.

O.

47. I want to make a dark mirror out of writing: one child facing the other, like Dora and little Hans. I want to write, for example, about the violence done to my father's body as a child. In this re-telling, India is blue, green, black and yellow like the actual, reflective surface of a mercury globe. I pour the mercury into a shallow box to see it: my father's right leg, linear and hard as the bone it contains, and silver. There are scooped out places where the flesh is missing, shiny, as they would be regardless of race. A scar is memory. Memory is wrong. The wrong face appears in the wrong memory. A face, for example, condenses on the surface of the mirror in the bathroom when I stop writing to wash my face. Hands on the basin, I look up, and see it: the

distinct image of an owlgirl. Her eyes protrude, her tongue is sticking out, and she has horns, wings and feet. Talons. I look into her eyes and see his. Writing makes a mirror between the two children who perceive each other. In a physical world, the mirror is a slice of dark space. How do you break a space? No. Tell me a story set in a different time, in a different place. Because I'm scared. I'm scared of the child I'm making.

48. They dragged her from a dark room and put her in a sheet. They broke her legs then re-set them. Both children, the wolfgirls, were given a fine yellow powder to clean their kidneys but their bodies, having adapted to animal ways of excreting meat, could not cope with this technology. Red worms came out of their bodies and the younger girl died. Kamala mourned the death of her sister with, as Joseph wrote, "an affection." There in a dark room deep in the Home. Many rooms are dark in India to kill the sun. In Midnapure, I stood in that room, and blinked. When my vision adjusted, I saw a picture of Jesus above a bed, positioned yet dusty on a faded turquoise wall. Many walls in India are

turquoise, which is a color the human soul soaks up in an architecture not even knowing it was thirsty. I was thirsty and a girl of about eight, Joseph's great-granddaughter, brought me tea. I sat on the edge of the bed and tried to focus upon the memory available to me in the room, but there was no experience. When I opened my eyes, I observed Jesus once again, the blood pouring from his open chest, the heart, and onto, it seemed, the floor, in drips.

49. I met Mahalai in Godamuri, where we were, to film a troupe of Marxist actors dressed as wolves, jungle animals, and children. I hung back in the village as the film-makers constructed a bamboo cage and R., the translator, persuaded a mother to undress her daughter, cut her hair, and dress her in a makeshift cloth diaper. I walked away from this scene and asked a woman rolling a cigarette if I could rest in her garden. Smiling, she said yes and offered me papaya from a stainless steel bowl at her feet. In Bengali. And I ate it. I ate language. As Mahalai, dexterous and blank, pinched finger after finger of tobacco to construct, in seconds, tight-looking bidis to add to the white pyramid be-

fore her, she sang. Her song was familiar and it made me want to cry. I was exhausted. Mahalai got up and poured some tea from a terracotta jug into a smaller clay cup and brought it to me. She was a wiry, tiny woman somewhere between forty and sixty with a long, oiled, grey-black braid down her back. She watched me drink, and then we talked in the place where her Bengali and my Hindi crossed. Then, without warning, she took my cup and set it on the ground. She grabbed me, shoved my head into her lap and started to massage my scalp. Her husband came home, carrying a bucket of wet clay and disappeared into their hut. My whole body felt rigid but then, abruptly, I submitted to her touch. When I woke up, I was covered with a shawl and someone, Mahalai, had covered me with tiny, pink-orange blossoms from the pomegranate bush at the gate. Was there a gate? R. found me and shook her head. I was officially somewhere on the edges of the story. A light rain set in and we returned to the lodge for a late dinner of fried fish, yoghurt and rice.

50. My own mother told me another story of possession, with its attendant fable of exorcism, as a child. There was

a girl of nine in the village of Nangal who had been overtaken by an evil spirit after a failed pilgrimage to the Kali temple in the hills above her home. Kali had come to her that night and stuck out her long, black tongue. The girl told her mother the dream, but by nightfall she had a fever and by the next night, was nearly gone. Each night the priest fed her purgative herbs, and at midnight, she was permitted visitors. "A few days later, my friend was dead, and I remember when we played by the river. Our cousin-brothers buried our dolls in the sand, but the rains came before we could dig them up. I cried and cried."

o. Citron-yellow dots collect and scatter. A silver sky collapses in folds upon the canopy. The grid divides then divides again. When the girl crawls out of the broken jungle, she's soaked in a dark pink fluid that covers her parts. Fused forever with the trees of the perimeter, she can't. The branches fill her mouth with leaves. I can't breathe.

51. What are your primal images? The man walking knee-deep across the outdoor swimming pool, a candle cupped in his palm? The ever-present running water at the corner of each black frame? Rain? Dogs? The color indigo or midnight blue next to gold. Your mother or father lighting the candles for Friday night dinner? Are you from another country? I wasn't expecting it, the immediate response to a temperature. My blood let out a deep sigh. Is it wrong to feel immediately at home in India, where, if its citizens knew you felt that way, would laugh you out of the house? But I felt it. Two minutes out of Kolkata airport, driving to the city, I breathed in the air in deep gulps, releasing the chemicals of permanence.

52. Seven years ago, I walked to the University of Colorado from my rented apartment on Goss. There, in the dark library, I closed my eyes and let my right hand drift over the stacks. Where my hand stopped, I opened my eyes, chose a book at random and read this: "October 17 Captured; Oct. 28 Leave Godamuri; Nov. 4 Arrive Midnapore; Nov. 10 Loin-