I am fixated with a particular picture in a National Geographic magazine. The picture is that of a face, which I am yet to memorize — colors splashed on a page; ink and print on glossy paper creating her contours. I would rather stick to the ripples of her story and wait for her face to float.

Her face is liquid; the refugee girl’s real face in that picture never solidifies.

The magazine is two years old now. Magazines tell their stories, yet never complete them. I just recognize her staring out from the page.

Her fixed staring at the camera horrifies me — I have memorized her staring without an image of her face. There is no future in the stare. A page full of a face, dissolved in the smell of paper swallowed by a stare! Her after-story grows like bubbles that she had perhaps breathed when the camera clicked: “How she finally escapes the glistening page, the magazine smell, the disgrace of being a refugee; even animals know where they belong! How she finally becomes a real face, forehead filled with dust.” — I have made several versions of her story.

I own that magazine. And I go back to that page to read my unwritten after-story many times through the week! Pages smell
different with years. Stories are retold, every time revised, never repeated.

Dogs love to play, cats can do their thing, but a photographer’s camera will capture one face after another to trap in a page.

Most faces have common stories. That commonness fills the background like living protoplasm; then suddenly out of the deep pool of commonness, one face stands out, you see an awesome face-story in the social wave. Sometimes you trap the face in different senses to remember it — almost like the unique library codes they had in the British Council Library in Bangalore. Doesn’t matter who the face belongs to. You know the code like a password, in that hard drive of your head.