

PERSONAL HISTORY DECEMBER 7, 2015 ISSUE

# TEACH YOURSELF ITALIAN

*For a writer, a foreign language is a new kind of adventure.*

By **Jhumpa Lahiri**



As I said before, I think that my writing in Italian is a flight. Dissecting my linguistic metamorphosis, I realize that I'm trying to get away from something, to free myself. I've been writing in Italian for almost two years, and I feel that I've been transformed, almost reborn. But the change, this new opening, is costly; like Daphne, I, too, find myself confined. I can't move as I did before, the way I was used to moving in English. A new language, Italian, covers me like a kind of bark. I remain inside: renewed, trapped, relieved, uncomfortable.

Why am I fleeing? What is pursuing me? Who wants to restrain me?

The most obvious answer is the English language. But I think it's not so much English in itself as everything the language has symbolized for me. For practically my whole life, English has represented a consuming struggle, a wrenching conflict, a continuous sense of failure that is the source of almost all my anxiety. It has represented a culture that had to be mastered, interpreted. I was afraid that it meant a break between me and my parents. English denotes a heavy, burdensome aspect of my past. I'm tired of it.