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## Monastic Observations\*

These are new chairs  
They're not made up of pine  
Pine's soft, it's oak I guess  
Your nails won't inscribe a single character on the finely  
Seasoned backrests  
It's the first time someone told me something like that  
Walking along the Willow Lane, she said,  
"You know, the sea makes me so happy."  
Tide from the North Sea drove a whale carcass  
Deep into the sea beach where a single mother was  
Trudging with her four-year old son.  
He dislikes wearing shoes  
Pushes his toes forcefully to make impermanent marks,  
Looks back a while to see them vanish with the retreating tide  
Another one breaks free, dies as the next one rushes  
With the corner of his eyes he tries to read her face.  
While a lot of us went there to wail across the shore  
Near the cemetery by the Unthank Road.  
Stand a while here with respect,  
The dead won't know whether you pay respect or not,  
It's disrespectful in the eyes of the living.  
Relics are no more there,  
The energy is supposed to fizz up from the bones  
To be transmitted to the living  
I wait for the communion—secret and holy and imperceptible  
To people I'm living with for years.  
That's an old story you are telling.  
Chocolate eggs from the Thorntons,  
Crab-shells from the seaside,  
Candy-wrappers from the litter boxes,  
Are souvenirs  
To them watching TV,  
Having supper back home.  
It's six hours of difference only,  
And everything's so different  
On the shelves of the Tudor Gallery.

Composed during a workshop on February 24, 2006,  
at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK.

"Newcastle is not half as exciting as Norwich is,"  
She said,  
It's because you were born there.  
"Petrol reminds me of Dhaka,"  
To me Dhaka is me,  
I grew up there,  
It grew up with me  
Around me, inside me, beyond me  
It's like looking at a place from different angles  
Through glasses, windshields, viewfinders of cameras.  
Pigeon is a sacred bird  
Its poop is nasty.  
Through perforated borders smuggles pass as passports identify  
us  
Papers not people  
"What's the purpose of your visit?" Why? Why? and Why?  
Looking beyond is something I want to do, not over  
Her shoulder again,  
I fail. I lack—good intentions!  
"Tell me, what's God's intention?"  
I remain silent for a while and admit faintly good question  
"What time is it in Bangladesh?"  
She asks me to change the subject,  
Instead of wearing a smile and spouting an answer I keep on  
Filling pages at the UEA Graduate Bar,  
We keep waiting for the take-away vegetable balti  
An unheard-of Indian Sub-continental dish though  
I'm from that part of the world.  
I wonder what marvel waits for me in the package  
The deliveryman promised to bring within 45 minutes.  
I wonder if I could sit and write at a bar in Dhaka,  
I'm brown here  
I'm white there

\* This poem was included in the anthology *Maps and Metaphors: Writings by Young Writers from Bangladesh and United Kingdom* (2006) published by the British Council.



## TO B BLIND IS A GIFT\*

I fear light  
It reveals  
Everything  
Even pores  
On a baby's Dove-washed  
Johnson's oil-pampered  
Cheeks

\* First published in *Spectrum*, Volume 4, June 2006 (Journal of the Department of English, Dhaka University).



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## Photo\*

### 1. Curtain

Spots on retina -- increase.  
Silhouettes -- now companions.

### 2. Transit

Half-withered 'kaya' rooted deep in earth;  
Yellowish green dots, on unmanned soil.

\* This poem was included in the anthology *The British Council Book of Emerging English Poets from Bangladesh* (2001) published by the British Council.

## Tea\*

He stands erect and still, his cheeks bulging out  
As if he has got water in his mouth.  
He never speaks.  
"Tea," utters a woman sitting next to me.  
He takes a cup, pours water into it from a steamy kettle,  
Sprinkles sugar, dips a tea bag; clatters down the cup in front of her.  
She takes a spoon and stirs. Sips. Her eyes travel around.  
Her lower lip, red and full, leaves its imprint on the lip of the cup.  
Red lipstick half moon hanging against cloud.  
He is looking at the cup, bemused.  
Pensive, his eyes blood shot.  
His face getting pale.  
Beads of sweat gather on his forehead.  
She sips again.  
His fingers tremble.  
Another sip, he looks waxy.  
I, instinctively, reach across the table and give him a shake.  
He looks at me, irritated.  
His eyes, colourless but sharp, fix me with a piercing gaze.  
I, unknowingly, utter, "Tea".  
He moves again: cup, steamy water, sugar cube, tea bag, spoon, clatter  
of the cup.  
For a while I sit still looking downwards.  
"Have it, I give you my heart."  
I look at the café owner, startled.  
He is looking at the cup now.  
I, mechanically, put notes on the table and walk out of the café.

\* First published in *Spectrum*, Volume 4, June 2006  
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