Airports, Missing Boarding Cards and Sleeping Women

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Airports can be pretty exciting places at times. Think of the one we have here in Dhaka. On the day you decide you must get on an aircraft and fly out of the country, to inject some fresh new doses of energy into your tired bones, you realise you have to make it into the departure terminal through circumstances in which sound has reached its highest decibel levels. Everyone is pushing, some are pulling and a few others are quite literally shouting. This last group happens to be people whose job is to ensure that no one who is not wanted inside the building makes his way into it. That is fine. We understand, but why must these people raise their voices and intimidate some people who plainly do not know why they are being shouted at?

And it is when you return to the country, especially from places where silence is a matter of fact and noise is an exception to the rule, that you know you are once more on familiar ground. And the first signs of what you are in for come when, having been informed that your luggage will arrive by a particular conveyor belt, you realise with something of consternation that in fact two conveyor belts are being used to transport to the arrivals hall the luggage from the plane you have just stepped out of. If you have family with you, you do not mind all that trouble, for while your spouse keeps her eyes glued to one belt, you do the same to the other. The problem comes in when you travel alone. Your eyes keep darting from one belt to the other, like a frightened rabbit, for you do not want to see the suitcase within the dark, safe confines of which you have your clothes, your books and the little gifts for the children at home slip quietly by. And you are not the only one with eagle eyes at that point. Almost everybody around you is doing the same. People are angry, some are truly desperate and some others are in a state of real panic at the thought that their luggage may not have arrived with them at all. And all of these people are, of course, united in the belief that the management at the airport is doing a terribly bad job. The curses fly and tempers go beyond the limits of the acceptable.

It is then that you miss the discipline at places like Heathrow. No one screams there and no one tries to jump the queue. You pass smoothly through the various formalities and realise, almost suddenly as it were, that you are actually in the departure lounge. You can choose between a sip of coffee or a browse at Waterstone's or Borders. If you are worried about missing your flight, don't. For there is that ubiquitous television monitor before you reminding you when you should be boarding. And that is that, unless you are so carried away by all that fulfilling sight of books there that time flies and you realise, to your horror, that the gate you should be at is actu-