said). Outside the window hangs a thermometer for conversational precision in such matters.

It might sound strange, but even in the northern room it's easy to remember the Bangladeshi south; it's easy to think of other rooms back in the *gram*. For just as Bangladeshis travel to their *gramer bari* whenever there is time, Norwegians use their *hytter* in the mountains for memory making, storing family lore, for passing weekends and holidays and festivals, like Easter with its daffodils and decorated eggs, or the freshly cut pine trees and colourfully-wrapped presents of Christmas. For Norwegian families, *hytter* can create a necklace of tiny precious moments, reminiscent of the long histories of family and community you can find in the *gram*.



The windows each have two glass panes, for halfway up their length, outside, a wavy line of snow exhales silence.

In the *gram*, conversations can be bright and bold and boisterous, like the Bangladeshi sun, with liveliness and expression to float across the sky, and in the Norwegian *hytte*, conversations can equally inspire with their subtlety and curiosity: the stillness of a snow blanket across the land.

The Norwegian language is a little overflowing with understatement: great things are 'a little good' and moments shared are 'a bit fun'. For if everything was fantastic, how could it be expressed it if things got even better? Let fantastic hold its strength, a word for rare use, and for all the many good things, those quiet *hytte*-evenings, let's keep it small. *Hytte*-talk is three red candles on a table. It's a little illumination to turn the coldest night a bit cosy.

Some of us are lucky, in the twenty-first century, for we can build a modern house, Bengali style, with the heart. It's a type of home that rests not on walls of brick or tin or mud; it needs no mortgage or ownership certificate and has a value money cannot measure. With foundations that lie within us, and passports and planes to take us and bring us, the modern house can span continents; it has endless rooms waiting to be discovered and re-discovered. One of the finest rooms in the house, as I have yet found, is the northern room.

Of course there are people who don't appreciate the modern house. There are those committed to impenetrable walls, who seek self-unity in others' division. Sometimes they bear slogans like security and national interest, mantra like the 'clash of civilisations', but at the end of valid concern remains the usual, age-old intolerance. I suppose it's a base fear of stepping into an



unknown room. It's a pity, for the beauty of the modern house (with its hole-in-the-ground northern toilet) is great, and it might be a better aim for the world to increase the number of people who can enjoy it.

Outside, if you brave the minuses, wrap yourself in soft jumper, thick jacket, striped scarf, waterproof gloves and woollen hat, if you step out of the *hytte*, the sky above can dazzle: fifty million stars gaze to Earth in wonder at our smallness. The crunch of snow beneath your feet sounds as a lorry in that place thick with silence, and sometimes the sky grants an added surprise: the aurora borealis, those sheets of Arctic light that curve and twist through the night, slipping away again without notice into the darkness at their desire.

With a dart of breath the candles are out and the *hytte* is dark. The bedroom windows are open, for the minuses to creep inside and grant sound sleep, under the warmest of blankets. And after the eyelids close, the mountain imagination is a little free to send small and pleasant dreams.