



## Sleepless nights

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I can't even say  
That I tossed and turned all night,  
For my back is frozen  
I can't turn on my side.

At dawn, the doorbell rings.  
It's the milkman.  
I try to rise from bed....  
My muscles spasm  
And the pain cripples me.

I can't get up.  
The doorbell rings again,  
This time a little more insistently.  
I slide off my bed slowly;  
Try to straighten my spine  
And suppress a scream.

Sleep has evaded me for months on end.  
No, for years.  
When I can't bear the pain anymore,  
I reach the emergency.

*Trivial case—  
Obese, middle-aged woman with a low backache.*  
I hear some students snigger behind the screen.  
They poke in a painkiller and push me off.  
But why does this happen every day?—  
I dare to ask.

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*Nothing on the X-ray  
Nothing of concern  
Everyone has backaches when they age.  
Lose weight —  
You will be fine.*

Not once have I been touched or examined.  
Until years later  
When I hurt my knee.  
Then, they are willing to see me.

Providence lands me up  
With a caring physiotherapist  
Who for the first time in two decades  
Undresses and examines me.

*Why didn't you come here before—?*  
She asks with a frown.

I wince tearfully at her gentle touch.  
My muscles feel like stone.  
My spine is curved to one side.  
My bones are brittle and fragile.

And they said I was imagining things.

Weeks of nurture follow.  
I heal under her gentle warm touch.  
And for the first time in decades  
I sleep like a baby  
For a full stretch of six hours.

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