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Florence Nightingale Receives a Visitor

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Florence Nightingale Receives a Visitor · *Margot Kriel*

Don't ask me if I remember
your father. I cut the blood-soaked
cloth from his legs. After the Battle
of Inkerman, men lay in their own filth.
I ordered scrubbing brushes and beds.

The minarets of Mihrimah Cami mosque
rise outside the second-floor window.
I coil ropes of linen. At night
a nurse falls in her own stupor,
skirts stain a punctured chest.
She is removed to England.

For thirty years I've lain here,
letters and viceroys pass the straits.
Your father lived with a lost leg.

Under the dome of Hagia Sophia
a cat stalks, its eyes wide
like the wake eyes of wounded
in pain. Divine wisdom
brought me here, out of whale-boned
convention, to treat an army.
Each crusted face and open wound,
I bathe and wrap.
Distant and sharp, a bell rings,
pebble slaps the surface.
I fall through clear water to rest,
my head to the East.

Don't think I cannot see you.
Like your father, you want me
to fall in your eyes. Young man,
I am already drowned. I snubbed
Lord Herbert before he died.