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# Great-Grandfather's Nurse

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## GREAT-GRANDFATHER'S NURSE

*Alexandria, 1954*

She is sitting on the terrace, holding  
My small hands. Dressed in her whites,  
She is the angel I have wished to touch.  
Her laughter floats and falls around me  
And becomes the house I want to live in.  
Again, Marta, I say, again. She pulls me up  
Clicking her tongue, her smooth legs  
Brushing mine, and my face nestles  
Into the easy scoop of her shoulder.  
I smell the scent of flowers or spices.  
Again, Marta, again. Upstairs  
Where I do not want to go  
My great-grandfather is sleeping  
Through his pain and illness  
And I am lucky, falling, falling  
Over the landscape of Marta's legs.  
My mother smiles and locks her arm  
In my father's. My grandfather is winking  
And whispering into my grandmother's white hair.  
Krikor, he says, you little knave,  
Krikor, you scoundrel, you little mouse.  
And before I know what I am doing  
I whisk the hem of her dress up,  
Kiss her thigh and stand before her  
Boyish and full of love.

*Then what?*

Confusion, shouting.  
My great-grandfather waking,  
Beating his cane against the metal bed.  
Marta rising, climbing the stairs  
Toward some retribution,

The oaths streaming down.  
The terrace emptying out.  
The *Alla aqbar* of the muezzin  
Calling the faithful.  
The minarets, the hot sun, the white city.  
My lips full of fear and prayer.  
My heart full of nonsense,  
Never as young, and the sea,  
The blue sea in the distance,  
The cold, unimplicated sea.

BEETHOVEN: SONATA NO. 14

*for Roma*

You were at the piano playing the “Moonlight,”  
A name Rellstab gave it when he heard  
The Adagio, and remembered moonlight  
Flecking the waves of Lake Lucerne.  
But this was afternoon, in Boston,  
The sun lighting up your apartment  
Like a flare, your fingers laboring  
Against a dead middle-C, and an A  
Which twanged in its several pitches.  
But it was Beethoven nonetheless,  
Surviving the accidents of time  
And circumstance, even the unlikely name.  
Outside, three floors below,  
The Asian children—Vietnamese, Cambodian?—  
Recently arrived like the last of so many  
Witnesses, were playing among themselves,  
Squealing in their small voices to the ends  
Of the street. You’d said you’d seen them  
In winter, the girls in sun dresses and sandals,  
The boys in short-sleeved shirts, as though  
Their parents knew no changes of season,