
HAVE A DRINK OF WATER

CHRISTINE DEGENAARS

Dark hair, almost black and a scar
like a fingernail along her chin. He caught her
by surprise with the flash of his Kodak
on a trip they had taken to Savannah.

It's his favorite picture of her, before she became
too thin and before she left Tennessee
for good for some place out west.
He has her sitting by the sofa on a low wooden stand
and I wonder how often he looks at her. Pretty girl.

Bernard's in the kitchen and I can hear him shuffling
his papers on the kitchen table. He isn't having a good day.
He won't hold his coffee cup and his bones are shaking
under his skin, dry and pallid as Elmer's Glue.

I ask him what he's looking for and I can feel my voice
echo and bounce off each door frame and window until
it meets him and funnels into his ear. I'm fine,
he says, but I'm not sure he believes that.

There are no other pictures of Kate in this place
and eleven bottles of pills. His doctors say he needs one
of each in the mornings. I help him count them out:
rilpivirine, tenovir, emtricitabine to start.

He'll only take them in the kitchen, at the table that hides
behind the refrigerator and the wall.
White and pink and yellow pills in hand,
he swallows them, invisible from view.