

Things of Beauty

by Paul de Denus

Time has slipped. Was it yesterday or weeks ago? The party at someone's house? So many legless people pin wheeling and reeling, the music blast, and the alcohol haze. The sketchy drink concoctions. The blackout.

The room she is locked in is a perfect square. The one window looks out toward a forest. A thin mattress is shoved against a wall. Several dated tabloid magazines scatter the floor. There's a white kitchen chair. On it sits the doll.

He's an ugly boy, with a glassy blue-eyed stare, protruding bellybutton and molded explicit junk. She doesn't understand why it's there, doesn't want to. She remembers the beautiful dolls she had as a child. Perfect features. Perfect hair. Not this one. She calls it, Dickey and a giggle escapes her mouth. This shouldn't be so funny. Her thoughts drift, unfocused, each moment blending to the next. The drift is seductive, a dreamy high, intense like the time she and Bobby Regan took LSD after school in his parent's basement. She doesn't remember much about it except for Bobby's roaming hands and the pull upstream.

Scraps of food are slipped through a small cat-door opening. And water. It has a coppery taste, metallic, a familiar taste, the party... when was it? She glances at the tabloid by her foot. The cover features Lincoln as a woman. Lincoln as a woman is not a thing of beauty. Her eyes linger on the headline along the bottom of the page. 'Kidnapped' it reads. She shuts down, merges into darkness.

At dusk, the Wolf herds them to the campfire. It's the name that registers because of the wolf's head he wears. Is it real? It seems to be. It smells of earth, wet ground. The other girls are quiet. She doesn't know their names or why they're there. Their pretty faces

glow in the firelight, dreamy in their own world. They are beautiful. They are instructed to drink the water, lots of it. She loses herself in the flames, marvels at the hypnotic fingers that snap and disappear into the night. If only she could.

A figure with a fox head sits in the low dilapidated shed near the tree line. The Fox is only a shadow sitting in deeper shadow. It's there only at night, inked in the yawn of the doorway opening. She turns and notices one of the girls has disappeared. She was there a second ago, an hour ago... was she ever here? The Fox has now vanished too.

In the daytime, in sparse moments of clarity, she can see the shed from her sealed window and observes the chair perched in its entrance. She calls it the "blue robin's egg". It was once pretty blue, speckled, a knockoff of the classic Eiffel shell chair. She clings to the memory for a moment, knowing such real things of beauty exist out there in the world, somewhere. But not in this one.

