

# ON LOVING LIONS

POETRY

*Lilabeth Martchenke*

Long and languid a lioness stalks.

Shoulders rolling, flicking tapered tail-tufts. Enraptured I was  
as I watched, be them real, reliable, or a cartoonish creature  
they capture my consciousness.

I close my eyes and imagine I fly across the grasses of the Mara. The feel of  
the earth beneath my paws as I flex feeling my inch and a half long, carbon  
fiber claws dig in and create furrows in the earth beneath  
me.

Stretching out underneath an acacia tree,  
languid and long and graceful and strong.

Coiled.            Regal.            Confident.

Is it so bad to want that?

To *feel* the ground give way  
underneath my dinner-plate paws as I run,

four-legs leaving two simply **outdone.**

I wish my body were a deadly weapon

*I say.*            I had never put the thought to words *before,*

Sure! but I did—I do I can't *ignore*

I wish I were a deadly weapon so that being **kind** was a deliberate choice I made each and every **time** instead of just a fulfilled obligation to ensure my own safety.

A croc who fancies themselves a cat-killer meets brutal claws and is given cause to take pause and I wonder what it would be like to enforce boundaries like that. a pack of lionesses bring down a wildebeest from **w i t h i n** an entire fucking herd and I am affixed; bewitched. I wonder what it is like to take down something so much

**larger** than myself.

Though if I were a lion I would sacrifice my sentience, my personhood, my me-ness. Would it be worth it?

I would be giving up taxes, and capitalism, and grind culture. I would be giving up the stresses and worries of a housing *crisis* and climate *crisis* and economic *crisis* **CRISIS**

**CRISIS**

***crisis***

I would finally be free of this crushing generational weight that there is no escape from this ever-tightening **noose**, this shrinking room impending doom

I would be free to run and to roam.

***To be.***

Lions are gifted teeth and claws, along with strong jaws. Great manes like chainmail to protect like elegant armor the roar and the presence it garners.

I have nothing but soft pink flesh, raw from the picking,

I can't stop. Nothing but a spine made of slime, likely a flavor I hate?

No finely tuned reflexes and muscles. I am held together

amidst *hustle* and *bustle* by rice paper *dolls* and soggy cotton *balls*

And I would **kill** for some claws and teeth.

I cut off my only *mane* in the *name* of mental health

and I know in my heart of hearts my roar is all I got

and it's not *that* impressive. **But**

would it?

Be worth it?

I would also be giving up my husband , my cats, my brother who stops me in my tracks because he looks and acts so much like Daddy before Daddy got sick. Coke Floats and Chai tea. The feel of a fleece flat against the futon. Folk rock and punk shanties.

Let me up the **ante**

My boots in the snow and smoke in my lungs. The taste of beef stew on my tongue. The thrum of the drum that beats as I dance

The loss ~~strikes~~ me like a lance

As I realize that the downfall. The reason I cannot heed that call-is my

appreciation for it *all*,

especially for the creature I so long to

**be.**