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.

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 **within** 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.