

## The Lioness

by Leo Phimphravichith

The Madeline Shaw Youth Prize

The crowd roared in a dark room with glimmers of light that felt like a glittery daydream. A community of bodies, torso to torso, feeling the bass vibrating through their chests. Rotating neon lights and speakers bumping Gloria Gaynor's *I Will Survive* is the background to the superstar that is on stage. A shimmering sequin bodysuit under a tulle skirt and a voluminous blue wig is somehow cart wheeling and completely emoting the lyrics at the same time. An exuberant crowd erupts as she hits the ground into a split. All eyes and applause goes to her. She fiercely performs to return the love. This is what she lives for. The lights. The music. The adoration.

When the night starts to become the morning, and the spaces inbetween the crowd start to get bigger, then she'll be left all alone. In her dressing room she takes off her hair, her nails, her bra, then her dress. Slowly removing each item one at a time just to put it all back on the very next day.

The dance floor fills up again, she comes alive and she's strutting to every beat. But, on a normal wednesday-four-thirty-suburbia afternoon, all that a stranger would see is a blanket tied around a waist and a hairbrush in hand. One boy spinning alone with his reflection.

He notices the time, so she begins to leave the stage. The boy's mum's voice echoes up the unremarkable staircase.

"Dinner is ready," she yells.

He unties the double knotted blanket and tosses the hairbrush across the room. Quickly removing every item just to put it back on the very next day. He leaves behind his three square metre oasis for a beige corridor with posed family portraits. Dragging his feet downstairs, upstairs, she patiently waits. A plate of penne and tomato sauce is a barrier between the boy and his angry dad. Across the small dinner table he breaks the awkward silence

"When I'm home don't play that girly music, I'm tired," the angry dad utters fork in mouth.

As the boy acknowledges with a tilt of his head, he clenches his jaw so he doesn't cry. He hopes that one day he could be more resilient, but mostly that he doesn't have to hide. Maybe if he was a girl he could cry, sing, dance and perform outside of his room. And maybe if he was a girl his family would love him for it.

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If you go to the corner of Oxford St, you will see queues, and they will be long, bustling into a hole in the wall. A neon sign out the front will read *The*

*Rainbow Jungle.* Sometime between eleven thirty and one in the morning, the Lioness will dance onto the stage and the crowd will scream in awe of her confidence. Now if you look into her eyes, past the galactic eyeshadow, you will see that same boy, now only treasured, now he is free.