

*Lycanthropy is the term describing the supernatural transformation of a person into a werewolf, like in movies and folktales.*

*It is also known as a form of madness involving the delusion of being an animal.*

### **Lycanthropy of a Black Boy**

Monday mornings,  
Jeremiah walks into my class growl ready.  
Foaming at the mouth with struggle.  
His teeth have been snarling the entire weekend.

King of his den.  
Only man in his house.

Jeremiah is seven  
and already howls at a full moon.

In class is when the daylight hits.  
You can tell it is warm and foreign.  
The claws retracts, he walks erect.  
He tries to smile,  
Plays with the other boys.  
Sometimes he forgets not to bite or scratch,  
Sometimes he forgets he too is a boy.

I hug all my kids before they leave.  
The first time I gave him a hug,  
he thought I was attacking.  
The hair on his back raised and sharp.  
Paws ready to defend.

Reminded me  
Being a black boy feels  
like you become a mantle piece,  
before you become a man.  
Snared in the world's delusion  
of black boys only being animals.

I know this complicated curse,  
Always having to transform in order to survive  
this concrete thicket of death and poverty,  
or the moon's prejudice and profiling.  
Where it's all hunt or be hunted  
trying to contain such a necessary beast.

All Black boys shapeshift themselves.  
To be aggressive,  
    growing up in a hood timid could get you shot.  
To be passive,  
    because showing your teeth to police might get you shot.

Silver bullets come from both the block or a badge.

While the privileged frolic in the prairie  
The ability to fail or fight without fear.  
No pale gaze making them monsters.

At schools where I've taught  
the white kids get mental health  
therapy, slap on the wrists.  
The Black boys get metal detectors  
felonies, handcuffs on their wrists.  
Prison pipelined into muzzle  
and collar before they develop a bark.  
Tried as beasts before seen as humans.  
Five times more likely to be held in captivity.

I don't want see Jeremiah  
gripped in a cage  
or hanging from a leash.  
A boy who just wants to listen  
to nursery rhymes  
and play football.  
So I hug him and teach him,  
because no one has  
because he deserves love  
and a childhood  
because the forest  
he's being raised in  
is all shadow and predators.  
I don't want this madness  
to devour another boy.

I show him  
my class is sunshine,  
Never wax or wane.  
Never crescent or full  
Blue or new

Nowadays he gives me a hug before and after school.

I teach him  
he is not an  
unnatural thing.

Not folklore.

Not a beast.

Just a boy

No matter what he sees in the forest.

No matter what the moon says.

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This poem is featured in the self-published collection *Chrysalis Under Fire*