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## The Bi-Meaning of Lycanthropy

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*Jessica Magnan*

## The Bi-Meaning of Lycanthropy

Traits found in the human forms of werewolves according to various legends:

1. Pale skin
2. Weak vision
3. Red hair
4. Absence of tears or saliva
5. Thick eyebrows
6. Fear of water
7. Excessive hair
8. Wounds on arms and legs
9. Severe mood swings
10. Eyes that draw you in
11. Long nails

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### **Anthropos. (Greek for man.)**

My hair is untamed. Rough to the touch, scraggly, shaggy, ragged, flowing, wavy, curly, thick, jagged, red. The red hair comes with skin white as snow, a white powdery skin dusted in freckles and flushed with more red.

It's the mark of the devil, red hair, and it's associated with all his anger and deceit and rage, like maybe we reached deep into hell ourselves and let the fiery waves lick our scalps so we could resurface to Earth to carry on his bidding. Ancient cultures and Medieval Europe burned many, starved many, imprisoned many, and hung many for their red hair, the sure sign of one of the following: allegiant of Satan, witch, vampire. Werewolf.

But my hair is beautiful and whenever my cousin visits she tells me, *You could have any boy you want with hair like that.*

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The first boy I ever had a crush on was named Allen. He was in my second grade class and we sat next to each other on the circle rug at story time. This is the only time I talked to him and I didn't know him at all, except his name was Allen and he sat next to me at story time. Once during an indoor recess he asked me to play checkers with him and I asked if he played the regular version or the kitty-corner version where you can jump checkers on the edges. (To this day I don't know if kitty-corner version is a real version of checkers or just something that my classmates made up at the time.) He played the regular version and I had *finally* found a good checkers-playing buddy. We spent every indoor recess playing Checkers: Regular Version until the day I moved out of the city, a forty-five minute drive to the cornfields and sheep farms of my new home. My teacher had everyone in class draw me pictures with nice messages on my farewell, to keep bound together in a booklet for safekeeping. The page from Allen had red and pink hearts around the border of his message. The bulk of it is lost in memory, but I can recall the bottom of the note, written in graphite "P.S. I really like you and I will miss you."

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When I'd grudgingly agreed to attend senior prom my mom asked if I wanted to get my eyebrows done or go tanning or get my nails painted so I could look beautiful for the boy who was taking me. (All of which I refused, aside from the mani/pedi. I'd heard that they make the dry skin on your feet and fingers feel really nice.)

I went with a boy I'd known for several years. I didn't particularly want to go with Lucas, but I'm too reliant on traveling in a pack to bear being the only solo girl among our group of friends, and any other alternative wasn't seemingly viable at the time, so when he'd asked while slightly kneeling in the muddy mix of gravel and the melting snowbanks of a party store parking lot, I'd said yes.

Wrong decision. As of now, two years later, I still can't get him to leave me alone. He'd been blind to my thick eyebrows, brushed as tame as they can go, yet still overly thick. Blind to my pale skin, the hollow color of moonlight. Blind to my sharpened nails, filed long and dripping in red.

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The one human who fits the werewolf-in-human form most obviously

is probably The Beast, like *Beauty and the Beast's* Beast. He is, of course, fictitious, but just remember all that fur. I'd watched the movie more than six dozen times by my eighth birthday and I still remember the scene with every animated characters readying him for a date with Belle. He came out with a thirteen thick curls in his normally wild beard and two blue bows, one atop his head and one under his chin. And a braid. And a curly-cue at the top of his head. So much hair. So I thought—and still question now—possibly werewolf. But by the end he turns full-on human without any question. And he ends up with the girl. And that's how all the Disney films go.

**Lykoi. (Greek for wolves.)**

The typical entertainment media story of an adolescent queer character goes as follows:

Character starts straight. Character has feelings about other character of same gender. Character is confused. Storyline of said character becomes about sexuality and how character will come out to friends/family. Character is now either the L or the G of LGBT. End of story. The exploration other story lines were—and still are—near non-existent.



The first girl I ever had a crush on was named Taylor. She was four years my senior and sat in front of me on the bus during my first year of middle school. Hair dyed jet black and piercings finding every blank space on both ears, she talked to me maybe a total of five times during the school year (one of which included her offering a cough drop because I suffered this tickling cough that I struggled to shake off for a solid ten minutes to no avail). I wanted wanted wanted to talk to her. I thought about it on a daily basis. But every time I boarded that bus I became mute, doomed to watch and never speak a word, trapped in my discomfort and confusion.

I listened to Taylor talk to the bus driver sometimes. They talked about how school was for her, how rotten some of the boys on the bus were, how things were going for her at home. Day to day small talk.

Mrs. Graham shouted at her once. Not the angry, mean shouting, but the hushed, concerned kind. The motherly kind.

*You shouldn't be doing that, Taylor. Is it for attention?*

*No. It's not. And it's my body. I can do what I want.*

I'd never heard Taylor like this, so blunt and short with clipped phrases, her shoulders facing straightforward, eyes on the parked buses in front of us before we rolled out of the busing lot.

*You need to stop, Taylor.*

*If I could, I would've by now.*

—

The very first time I'd been explicitly asked (or asked at all really) about my sexual orientation I'd been sitting alone in my first college dorm room watching Orphan Black, a show I was quickly falling in love with by the second episode, when Ex-Prom-Date texted me. I'd been ever so unfortunate to have him choose the same exact university as mine and he was now a ten minute walk away instead of the ten minute drive I'd been accustomed to. The conversation went something like this:

Lucas: Good morning beautiful :)

Me: Hey

Lucas: Whacha doing?

Me: Homework

Lucas: Wanna hang out later?

Me: Not really

Lucas: Aw why not?

Me: Homework

Lucas: You can't always have homework Jesse. You never hang out anymore. I miss you.

Me: Sorry I'm busy

Lucas: Hey Jesse

Lucas: Do you even like men

Lucas: I mean I've never seen you with one before

Me: I'm not gay Lucas.

Still blind as hell. Just now blind to different things. Like now he saw my moonlit skin and my devil-red hair and near-unibrow (which I'd been religiously plucking to hide anything obvious—and was clearly failing). He was blind to everything else and only saw those things now. He only saw the wolf.

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Once I saw wolves at the zoo when I'd been about nine. They were small and all too doglooking; I had a German shepherd at home much bigger and more menacing than that lot. I wanted them to howl, that's what wolves do right? But not these. One of the darker ones with a matted tail lifted her head and let it fall back down to rest on her paws. Too docile, too domestic. Too caged.

Wolves were supposed to be wild spirits with sharply pointed teeth and threatening auras, much like that of Jessica Evans, one of three sophomores who shared my name, and one who happened to ride my bus when I began sitting in the back and Taylor had long moved away. So much leather, too much eyeliner, snake bite piercings with spiked rings, and canine teeth dipping into her blood-colored bottom lip. Much more intimidating than that pack of wolves. Her voice graveled on her r's when she threatened other kids for sitting in her seat, *You better move.*

I would never dare to and just about everyone who did, did so by mistake and scurried to the front immediately. But every so often there'd be one who played Tough Guy. *Make me, dyke.* Her lip would curl back, sliding up her jagged teeth after her tongue darts out to wet those dark red lips in anticipated preparation. *What did you say to me.* Not a question. A dare to tell her again. And even fewer took this dare, except the rare preteen brats, begging for attention. Even if from this fierce kid, triple their size and ready to rip their throats from their skeletal frame if need be. *I said, Make me. Dyke.*

I lapped at scoops of bear claw ice cream while watching the wolves, the milky brown ringing around my hungry smile and the July heat making some of it drip to the dirt path below like the blood of raw rodent fresh from hunting. Even I was more wolf than these wolves. I squinted at the pack again. Maybe they are not wolves.

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The summer after freshman year of college became less lonely when I immersed myself in a group of people who all had one thing in common:

Orphan Black was our favorite show, which was weird to me because all these people were gay girls and I wasn't. But queer people have a way with putting the same exact shows on their Netflix queues; that's what happens when the pool is so limited. And our queues were very much aligned.

The week I moved into my second year of college I'd sent a bracelet to Jasmin, one of the girls with matching Netflix queues. It'd been made of those colored strings that work as crossstitch thread and bands together three colors: A thick band of blue, a thin strip of purple, and another thick one of pink. She sent me a picture of her wearing the bracelet and it circled her wrist brightly in the picture, but it wasn't the first thing I saw.

Thin lines of white and red marked up her arm. I counted seven scars, most of whose full length was hidden by the angle of her camera. I wondered how far up her arm they go, how deep into her skin a blade's sliced to make those old abrasions so visible to me now. I never asked about her scars, but sometimes she would tell me.

There's a younger version of herself with the broken razor pieces at her bathroom sink, the tiny sleek blades torn from their handle, half the length of her pinky finger. Younger-her is blind with a pained numbness before pushing the blade into her arm and dragging it across her skin. When her blood seeping from from the deep slices aren't enough, she swallowed pills.

### **Lycanthrope.**

By the time I'd taken my seat on the bus sophomore year, diagonally across from Jessica the Werewolf, the idea of werewolves had become less of concern, but nine-year-old me would have her pegged werewolf for sure. Human by day, wolf by night. Not one or the other, *both*.

She even looked both at once most of the time. Especially when those daring kids called her "dyke." Her voice gurgled in her throat, a low guttural sound, with a face twisted with menace in the sharp slits of her dark eyes. *I'm not a dyke.*

*But you kissed a girl, they would challenge. They were in for it.*

*I ain't no pansy. I didn't "kiss" a girl, I went down on a girl. Doesn't fucking make me a lesbian, kid.*

The kid would look at her confused. Even I would look at her confused the first time I heard it. Last time I knew, girl + girl = lesbians. But I was wrong, as she explained for all of us every time some smart ass kid tried to be cool and use that default derogatory name for females who don't fit the cookie-cutting femininity that high school girls were supposed to have. And despite labeling herself bisexual, a number of whispered rumors of *confused* and *easy* became her hushed label far more often than *bisexual*. There was straight; there was gay. You were one or the other.

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*So I, uh. Told Chantelle.*

*Aww, did you?*

*It was an accident. She saw my twitter and was like 'Oi, you got a girlfriend or what?' So I kinda had to tell her.*

*Hey, that's okay baby. What'd she say?*

*She got kinda pissed about it. She kept calling me a lesbian and it pisses me off because like, no. I'm bi. Stop erasing who I am.*

Now that Jasmin is my girlfriend, I know she has more scars than I've been able to count at one time. I know her mom locks up all the family's medication to keep her from downing them. I know that the numbness stops her from crying when the blade scrapes across old scars, maybe only after the bleeding stops. And I know that when people keep telling you you aren't real, you don't even want to be real anymore.

*You need to stop, Jas.*

*If I could, I would've by now.*

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Freshman year of college I laid on my lofted bed, spending my Sunday racing through my Netflix queue which lead me to Orphan Black, Season 1, Episode 8. My roommate was gone for the weekend and I had the luxury of watching shows without wearing headphones that day. The show became a background to my BIO 105 homework and I didn't look up to the screen much until sound of the show's lesbian character told another woman "I know, I know. You're not gay and I'm a total idiot."

Delphine, the “not-gay” woman nodded a little, blonde curls bouncing along with her head as the two shifted around the room in awkward tension as she came through the door and into the apartment. The other woman flailed her hands in intricate illustrations, rushing to delve into scientific explanations for their PhD studies that went far beyond the language my BIO 105 class can provide knowledge for. I looked back down to my book, mildly irritated. *Not-gay and therefore straight. Same old, same old.* I flipped the page.

“I never considered bisexuality. For myself, you know?”

My eyes flashed back to my laptop, pencil skidding to the floor.

“But as a scientist I know that sexuality is...a spectrum. But you know, social biases, they codify attraction. It’s contrary to the biological facts.”

I think about Lucas calling me gay, I think about people assuming I’m straight. I think about people telling Jasmin that her sexuality isn’t a sexuality at all. I think about how aliens and witches and werewolves have more representation in television than the two of us do.

Social biases sure do a lot to codify attraction.

—

I know a lot of bisexual women today; we travel in packs, helping each other, supporting each other, protecting each other. There’s power in numbers. But there’s not enough numbers, not enough power. We’re trapped in a cage out of public eye, left invisible in our faint moonlight.

But we hold onto the moonlight; it’s who we are. We are the symbols of two crescent moons that I paint now on watercolor paper to hang proudly. The moons, backs barely grazing each other, the left one slightly raised above the right, have the polar tips as blue that gradually turn pink, creating purple in the middle. The symbol of bisexuality, a mythical mix, a legendary fusion, a lunar spectrum.