



In Which the Moon Rises / the Wolf

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WHEN I AM diagnosed at twenty-two, two months short of my birthday, there is no devastating drop of the heart into the fluid of its own chamber, no cyclone of tears and wailing about a cursed fate—none of the cinema commonly afforded to the revelation of so serious a chronic illness, so definitive an ascription for the rest of one's life.

Rather, I think all that happens is that I lean forward from the clinic's couch, still hugging my favorite cushion, and furrow my brows at my doc, who for several visits has done the same while poring over the pile of notes and tests in my patient folder. Every session leading up to this one has been a careful exercise of plotting details into some sort of wide personality map, assembling a puzzle out of odd shapes and lines—completed, it spells out *bipolar*, and the initial perplexity gives way to a hunger for all the little truths behind the one:

“Doc,” I ask, “what makes it so?”

“Since you first came here, I've been noting down several things that occur as part of patterns, those which fit the bill. I'd like you to reflect on some of your unique patterns, in which . . .”





1. It is just my inheritance. I am now one of the women amongst many of them on my maternal side to have caught this plague of sleeplessness, the one that renders each strand of life almost feral. Mom is the least of them and there the two of us always are in the house, never asleep before 2:00 AM—those long hours that Mom writes and prays, all the rooms still awash with yellow lamplight. Tati Ina, too, whiles away those hours spinning long smoke ribbons from her mouth. And my cousin Adu one day fell to the fever with that name and lost both language and movement for a while, recovering in the hospital's ominous "basement."
2. The mess and the hoarding are as much a giveaway. Like a magpie, I tend to frantically obtain and stack away random items—notebooks, pens, key rings, stickers, patches, bottles—and rearrange them to bursting capacity in small spaces, an act that I repeatedly, equally frantically, express guilt over.
3. My speech occupies my every waking minute, and at an unstoppable speed. My gestures follow: my weaving, clenching, clawing hands. Everything blooms into action: a race to walk everywhere, hold everything, talk to everyone until my teeth fall out.
4. My blood. It's probably my blood, and my skin among all other things. I've told Doc that while these things happen, I feel my hot blood shift under my skin like circuitry, and it flashes in my fingers and eyes as such, and comes in shocks and in dead drops as such, and gives rise within me to a different kind of animal.

To narrow it down among the two known kinds: Bipolar Type II, the more common form, characterized by experiences within the span of a year of a mix of hypomanic and depressive episodes—thus "bi-polar," two sides of a coin, the two extremes into which your blood flow will seem to swoop, in which:

1. The hypomania seems the peak of your selfhood, where suddenly a few nights will zoom by and your life will seem to follow. There will be that sudden hunger to "obtain," and with it a sense of raw power to do so, a greater impulse to act upon whole territories of decision as one great force of being;
2. On the other hand, the depression, a great fall oftentimes after a great high, where time completely stops all around you, and suddenly your body feels tapered with stones, especially along your spine. Your self is in stasis, with the only allowance for further movement inches across or inches down.



The first conclusion is brief, but holds clarity. Doc and I decide that from the point of diagnosis onwards we will try to draw some sort of blueprint for my life which will involve medication, regular therapy, and a special commitment to “heightened” consciousness as the change unfurls.

CLASSICALLY ALIGNED TO the myth of the werebeast is the moon, itself a body and force mythologically rich. I remember a session that Doc and I talk at length about the rapture of the full moon, the disquiet that lunar effect is said to bring to every level of nature: from the turning of the tide, to the feverish heightening in reproduction for different animals, to the superstition that patients multiply in the ER and that doctors work against a higher risk of death due to blood loss.

Perhaps not uniquely, I take on for myself the metaphor of the werewolf, the shapeshifter. This is a constant narrative in which the caprice of the night turns the human being bestial, enslaved in a state of brute impulse and desire. Living labeled as bipolar is at first a calendaring of human days versus bestial days, calibrating human versus bestial levels, and the art of killing bestial traces with man-made interventions, in which:

1. The arsenal in my pillbox multiplies over time. My baseline mood stabilizer, L 150–200mg, is an anticonvulsant, meant to steady my overall blood level. Taken daily, it is augmented eventually by T 50mg, to boost metabolism; Q 25mg, an antipsychotic, for maintenance; and the particularly strong, yet soothing Z 10mg (highly regulated), for insomnia. Adjusted as necessary, this “cocktail” addresses the chemical factor of living, and for the most part gets me through normal, diurnal, 9-to-5 human existence.

(However, not all cures are created equal. We learn the hard way of the ones that don’t work: O 25mg hampers my thinking and movement; R 2.5mg ignites almost a blood-fever; F 10mg is by far the most discordant—at its worst, injurious.)

2. My monthly period is the moon’s menace, and as early as ten days before its expected arrival, I’m supposed to track personal irregularities in my mood, eating habits, energy levels, sleep, and pain tolerance.

Some cycles, even the miniscule changes, feel monstrous. Some cycles themselves dangerously miss the regular mark. In my blacker moments, I wonder how I’ll survive through my menopause, if I’d managed ‘til then.



3. When episodes occur in detail, whether random (of nature) or triggered, I am expected to try and grab one of those hoarded notebooks and diarize patterns, prevailing emotions, or impulsive actions—especially if the latter can be classified as dangerous to myself, or to others, or the balance of the universe at large.

And yet this ordered system is not infallible to human concerns, such pains as consequence of, or alongside, its workings, in which:

1. There is nothing comforting, for example, about my change in appearance, about the seesaw between extreme weight gain and loss, each bloat and heavy white thigh mark. It is inevitable given my chemistry. But the science does not prepare for the ugly feelings behind discovering too-loose or too-tight articles of clothing; looking at old pictures from high school or college, looking and not finding my old face; taking with clenched teeth the Christmas well-wishes of “better health and a love life” from family and friends.
2. The phenomenon of “night loneliness” is a keystone of troubled days. At any time between 1:00 to 3:00 in the morning I rehearse messages to myself, then debate on transmitting to friends across my social media networks:
 - a.i.1.a. *yo. are you still awake right now?*
 - a.i.1.b. *i am sorry.*
i just wanted to talk about—never
mind. i am sorry.
i don't want to bother—but i've
forgotten to sleep—and for that, i am
terribly sorry . . .
3. Overall—despite all these efforts to cull at the human—my human life itself comprises a number of small messes. There are those that tempt, on occasion, to heed the call of the feral.

THE QUARTERLIFE CRISIS hit where it hurt for a formerly wide-eyed, gregarious kid who loved everything about the outside world. Once an honor student and org leader, then an MA enrollee and English teacher for high school students, I move to government to learn from and support the development sector—only to be, along with many, on the receiving end of its hypocrisy; witness to the lies and corruption



on which it built the country; and subject to constant, institutionalized abuse.

I enter my mid-twenties tagged “wakened wolf,” a period in which my symptoms now fully manifest. In addition, I am exhausted, disillusioned, and jealous of others. The times my blood rises and falls, my body follows; the nights that I dream, I have nightmares, but these are still better than the torture of not sleeping at all.

The agitation peaks over the years. The family business fails, and it sows resentment between my parents and my brothers. For the first time, my father, too, is plagued by the sleeplessness, overcome by the charge the night gives to our troubles. The night that Mom brings him to the hospital, I am affected as well. I scatter shards all over the bathroom and bludgeon myself black. It is one of those times that for days, I forget how to sleep, and when I return as a human, each hour seems slower, and equally bleak.

A few senseless nights, I have even wanted to die. For some of them, it is from the most horrifying “want,” not the slow-burn breaking-point type of conviction, that death menaces me—quickly, rapidly, violently. There is a manic night that I fling almost every small furnishing in the house, upset all the canned goods and jars in the refrigerator looking first for something to eat, then handle, then throw—destroy. I quell a panic attack by speaking to several friends online before my parents find me, and the possibility goes unnoticed for the moment.

Another, I recall I am already unstable at a triggering moment: one night my gentle father, himself recovering from the stresses, tells me as an afterthought, *think of all that’s happened and please don’t burden our family*. I slam the door at him, and the guilt and anger trap me once again to the cave of the bathroom. At first my mother is angry at me for lashing out—then she sees I am seized up and babbling, and she compels me to drink holy water. I curl at the foot of their bed, on my dad’s side, and try wiping the wish of the body to tear itself outward full force.

Some nights, it’s the opposite feeling, the more familiar kind: the awful wish of the body to never rise in the morning, the dare of the spirit to test its limits to live. Some nights, I idly count the sedatives in my pillbox and note how many could knock me past breathing point—and I fantasize about drinking at full moon and submerging my face in the tide of my bathwater, never to resurface.

But I hate those nights more than anything, and the creature I’ve become.

I hate the aftershocks of polar living, of being isolated and out of control. And when it all comes down to it, I hate the fear that this sows—the fear that my soul will succumb to the dark.

Where there is fear, there is still the ability to feel. I am fully alive the day I awaken to a flood of grief on Facebook for a dear friend of friends. I am chilled by



the face of Bianca, I am haunted by the many questions left unanswered by the void she left in the night.

I am fully alive the day they tell us that my friend Sei and her whole family were found dead in their house, and the image is brutally senseless from the time that the story is woven in all its terrible threads to the time that I leave a paper kite on her coffin. I am in utter disbelief that only weeks ago, months ago, we had been laughing about her jabs at my love life.

When I am alive, I fear death, and losing life I don't deserve—and I remember how it hurts because we love, when we are human.

THERE IS ONE THING that this odd little blueprint has proved: the sense that I am a small map of fragments—most of which are imperfect, and jagged, and sharp, but others perhaps more fancifully handled by God. It is a neater idea than that of a movie trope in which a sick woman's life is drastically changed after her suffering, and each phase of her happiness falls into place in a straight line.

Wolf's Rain is an anime I've watched about wolves seeking Paradise with the help of a lunar flower in the form of a girl. In the midst of a hard, eventually tragic journey, the wolves take comfort in the flower-girl's song, and their purest dreams of hunting in snow forests and finding mates are conjured from her tender lullabies.

I'd count the best of what's similar—where, in the night, a “pure dream” begins—as like one of these ones, in which:

1. Being good with the medicines pays off, and Z 10mg and some warm water pulls me into blank, healthy, dreamless sleep. The moon becomes, strangely, a beautiful thing, the round shadow of passing clouds in the nighttime. The morning, too, has its own mundane, glad possibility.
2. This is the dream: my raised, mottled skin forms into something, someone else's—white, fragrant, and soft. This is the dream where a kiss blooms somewhere, slow and incredibly gentle, and knees are shaped from the clay of the dream-world to press against each other in the first of many embraces.

It is, as I realize, only half a dream. When I wake, I move not my eyes, but my nose, to inhale the scent of yesterday's laundry and pillowed hair, and find the crevice of skin upon which to rest against. Then, once more, I sleep.

3. I awaken in cold sweat at exactly 3:00 AM, like the worst nights. But this is different. This is the dream I have on my twenty-third birthday





after the witching hour passes, in a dead-stiff and fearful state: at a restaurant, I encounter and rather lucidly speak to my ex-boyfriend, James, and the rest of his immediate family. Then the shape of a man forms behind them, a gangly man with gold glasses—this is James’s father, who’d died a month prior; the man who’d once move mountains, stop all of Manila traffic for the two of us for any date, house visit, or late-night coffee run on the way home.

There are long minutes that Tito Jimmy and I talk, suspended; about what, I forget. But I interrupt him to say *I know this is a dream Tito*, and he asks why, and I tell him, *In this world, you are alive*.

I awaken, crying, for many things in the past forgiven, and now known, and remembered.

4. This is the dream: I am suspended in some kind of memory where a boy in a crew cut and mary janes waits outside of a cathedral for a woman who lights a candle. In a flurry of prayer I hear my own name, and I see it on signs and hewn in the stone. I reach out to the woman in a fumbling way, and I call in her direction with my name.

I talk to Mom sometime later about finding a website detailing the etymology of mine and my late grandmother’s name—Spanish for “refuge” or “shelter”—and the strangely assigned devotion to the Nuestra Señora de los Desamparados, of Valencia: the mentally ill. The holy ground blessed for Our Lady of the Abandoned was allegedly lent to the world’s first refuge for lunatics, an official psychiatric hospital.

“What a coincidence,” Mom exclaims. “Not only is she your namesake, yours and Lola Amparo’s, but your spiritual bedrock, even. Your father’s family grew up their whole lives in Sta. Ana—and their parish was the parish of Our Lady of the Abandoned. Pray doubly hard, then, to your patroness every night—that in your sleep, she may bless you, and in love bind us all.”

5. This is the dream: it is like I am wiping water out of my eyes after diving and resurfacing—and indeed, I am in a swimming pool now; I’m at summer camp with the cancer patients of my collegiate org, Kythe, who for three days are off chemo to relax with volunteers and with one another.

We have been fretting about Michael, who for some meals has thrown up and has been carried around the camp grounds, dizzy and weak. The summer’s been a hard one in Tarlac Hospital where he





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has previously held base. Yet when I make faces at him, he wears a gamely, puppy-like smile, and in this dream he keeps it as he floats in a *salbabida* beside me, crowned with a halo of morning sunlight.

Then it goes that those dreams transform into days, the ones where the mornings are peopled with life. Those days I'm awake to prowl on my own, hopeful to live for another cycle, another long night.

In which the dark falls and the light rounds its shape in these phases—awakened, the wolf; alive, what is human.