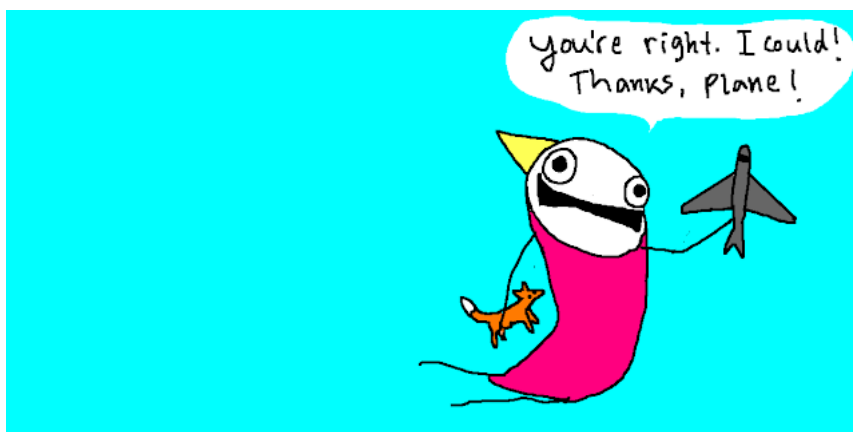
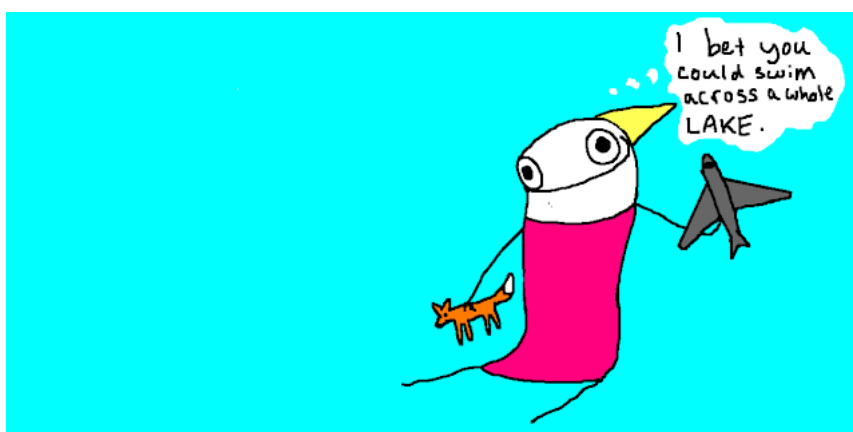




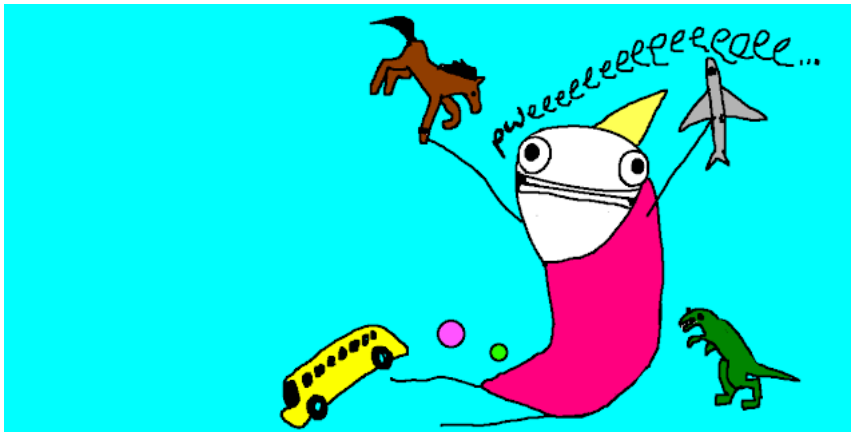
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Depression Part Two

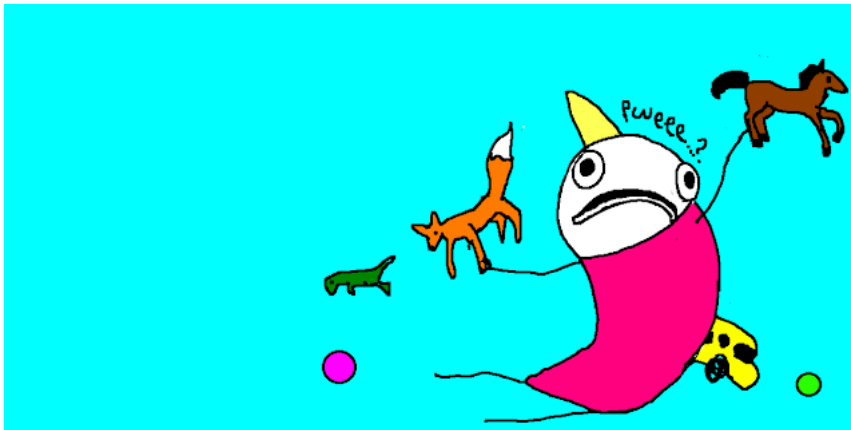
I remember being endlessly entertained by the adventures of my toys. Some days they died repeated, violent deaths, other days they traveled to space or discussed my swim lessons and how I absolutely should be allowed in the deep end of the pool, especially since I was such a talented doggy-paddler.



I didn't understand why it was fun for me, it just was.



But as I grew older, it became harder and harder to access that expansive imaginary space that made my toys fun. I remember looking at them and feeling sort of frustrated and confused that things weren't the same.



I played out all the same story lines that had been fun before, but the meaning had disappeared. Horse's Big Space Adventure transformed into holding a plastic horse in the air, hoping it would somehow be enjoyable for me. Prehistoric Crazy-Bus Death Ride was just smashing a toy bus full of dinosaurs into the wall while feeling sort of bored and unfulfilled. I could no longer connect to my toys in a way that allowed me to participate in the experience.



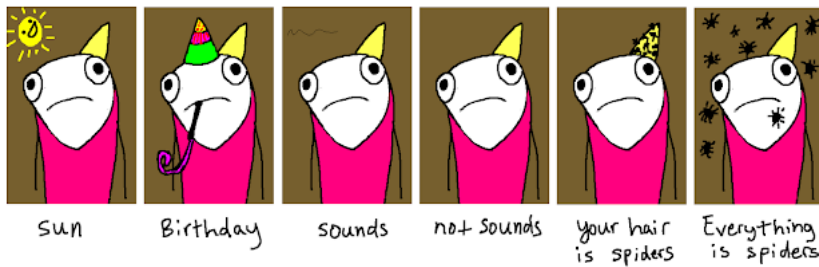
Depression feels almost exactly like that, except about everything.

At first, though, the invulnerability that accompanied the detachment was exhilarating. At least as exhilarating as something can be without involving real emotions.



The beginning of my depression had been nothing *but* feelings, so the emotional deadening that followed was a welcome relief. I had always wanted to not give a fuck about anything. I viewed feelings as a weakness — annoying obstacles on my quest for total power over myself. And I finally didn't have to feel them anymore.

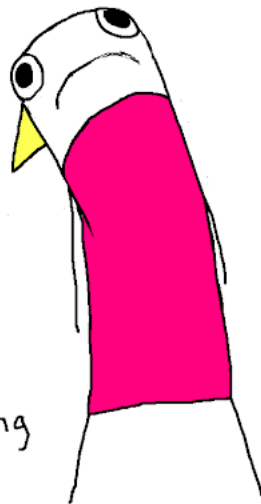
But my experiences slowly flattened and blended together until it became obvious that there's a huge difference between not giving a fuck and not being *able* to give a fuck. Cognitively, you might know that different things are happening to you, but they don't feel very different.



Which leads to horrible, soul-decaying boredom.

I wonder what
today is going to
be like...

... oh. Nothing
again. Okay.



I tried to get out more, but most fun activities just left me existentially confused or frustrated with my inability to enjoy them.



Months oozed by, and I gradually came to accept that maybe enjoyment was not a thing I got to feel anymore. I didn't want anyone to know, though. I was still sort of uncomfortable about how bored and detached I felt around other people, and I was still holding out hope that the whole thing would spontaneously work itself out. As long as I could manage to not alienate anyone, everything might be okay!

However, I could no longer rely on genuine emotion to generate facial expressions, and when you have to spend every social interaction consciously manipulating your face into shapes that are only approximately the right ones, alienating people is inevitable.



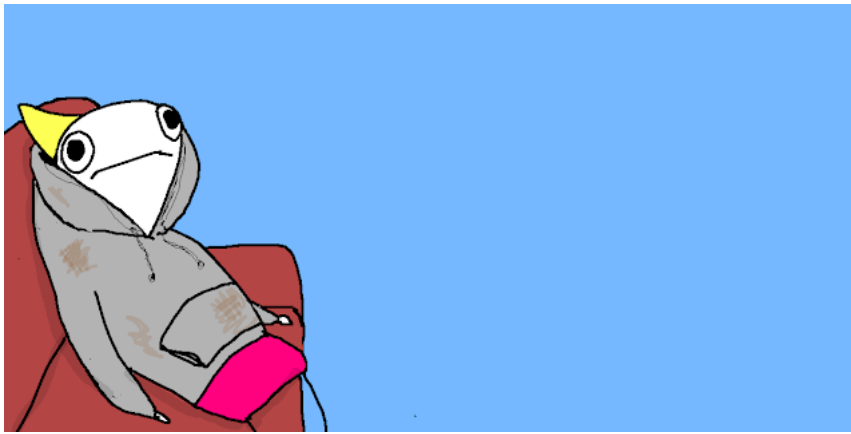


Everyone noticed.

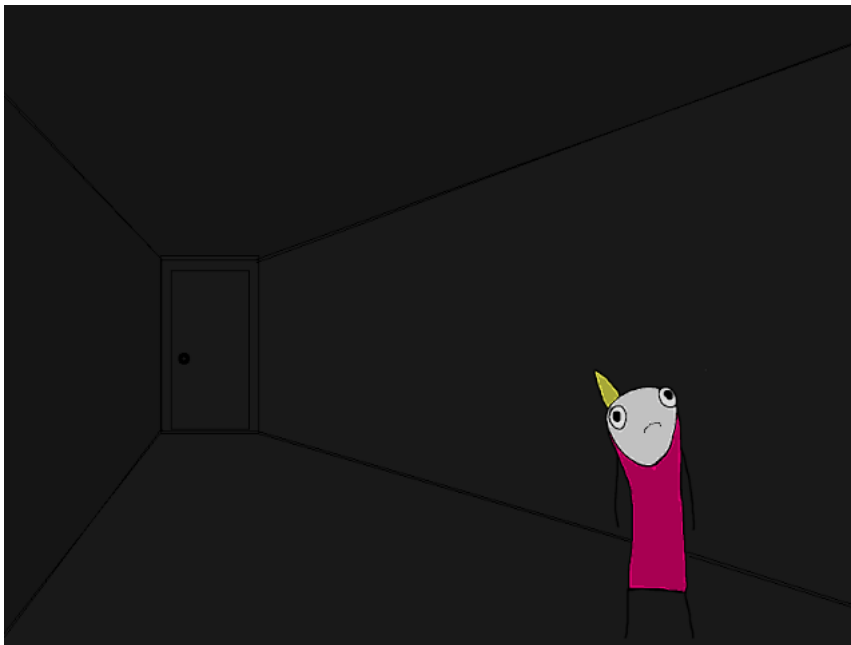


It's weird for people who still have feelings to be around depressed people. They try to help you have feelings again so things can go back to normal, and it's frustrating for them when that doesn't happen. From their perspective, it seems like there has *got* to be some untapped source of happiness within you that you've simply lost track of, and if you could just see how beautiful things are...



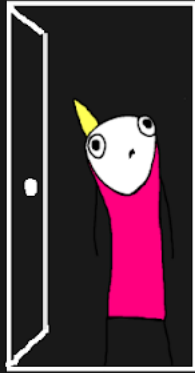


At first, I'd try to explain that it's not really negativity or sadness anymore, it's more just this detached, meaningless fog where you can't feel anything about anything — even the things you love, even fun things — and you're horribly bored and lonely, but since you've lost your ability to connect with any of the things that would normally make you feel less bored and lonely, you're stuck in the boring, lonely, meaningless void without anything to distract you from how boring, lonely, and meaningless it is.



Oh, are you trying to get away?

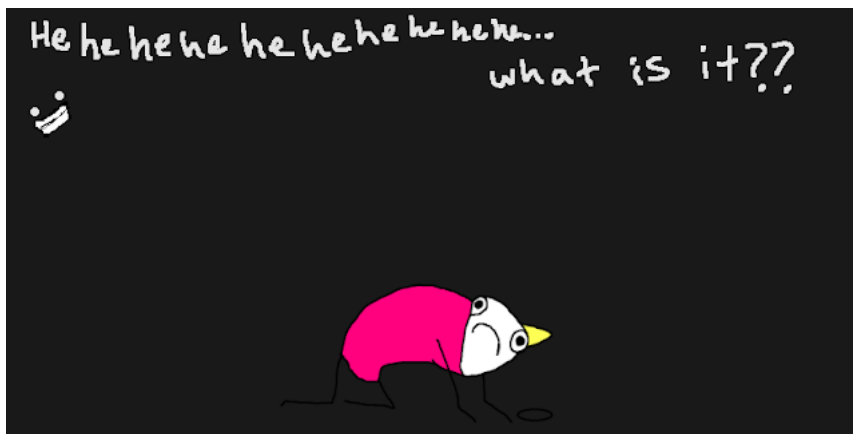
go see
what's
over there...



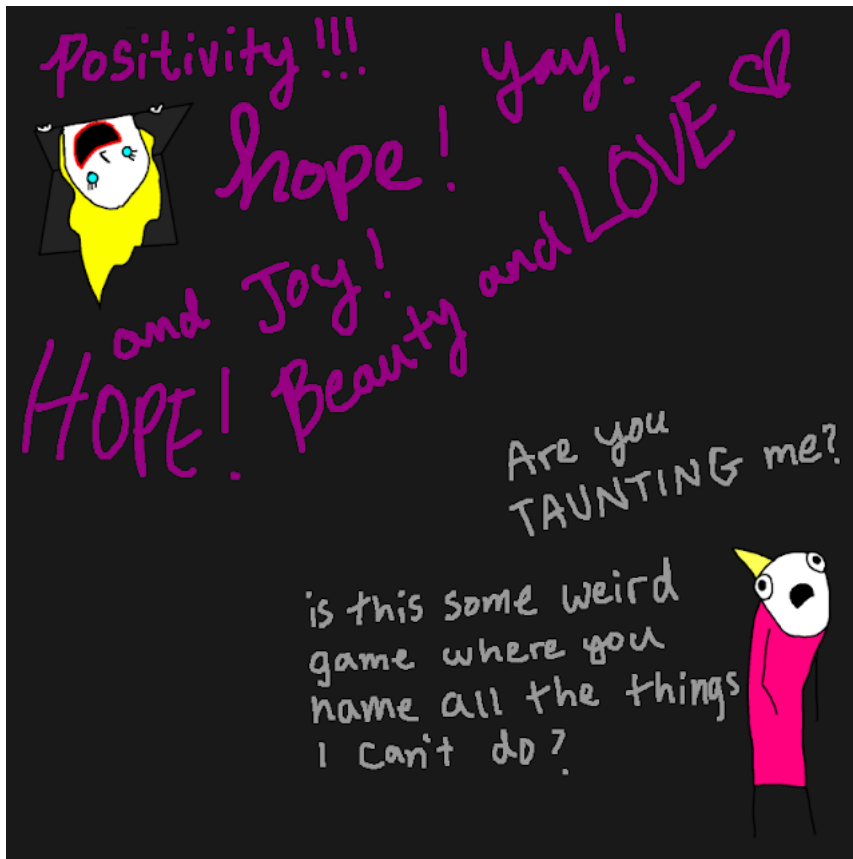
Surprise! It's nothing!

... but what's
in the hole?



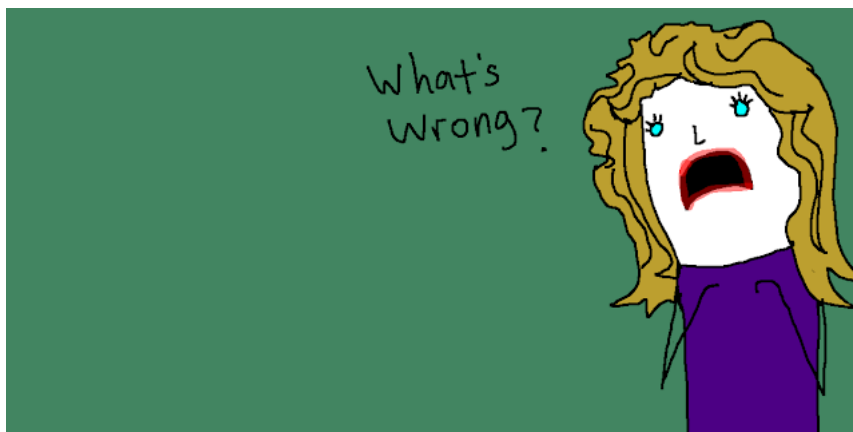


But people want to help. So they try harder to make you feel hopeful and positive about the situation. You explain it again, hoping they'll try a less hope-centric approach, but re-explaining your total inability to experience joy inevitably sounds kind of negative; like maybe you WANT to be depressed. The positivity starts coming out in a spray — a giant, desperate happiness sprinkler pointed directly at your face. And it keeps going like that until you're having this weird argument where you're trying to convince the person that you are far too hopeless for hope just so they'll give up on their optimism crusade and let you go back to feeling bored and lonely by yourself.



And that's the most frustrating thing about depression. It isn't always something you can fight back against with hope. It isn't even something — it's nothing. And you can't combat nothing. You can't fill it up. You can't cover it. It's just there, pulling the meaning out of everything. That being the case, all the hopeful, proactive solutions start to sound completely insane in contrast to the scope of the problem.

It would be like having a bunch of dead fish, but no one around you will acknowledge that the fish are dead. Instead, they offer to help you look for the fish or try to help you figure out why they disappeared.



My fish are dead.



Don't worry!
I'll help you
find them!
Are there any
clues where
they went?



I know where they are...
the problem is they aren't
alive anymore.



Let's keep looking!
I'm sure
they'll turn
up somewhere!





The problem might not even *have* a solution. But you aren't necessarily looking for solutions. You're maybe just looking for someone to say "sorry about how dead your fish are" or "wow, those are super dead. I still like you, though."



WHY CAN'T ANYONE SEE HOW DEAD
THESE ARE??



I started spending more time alone.

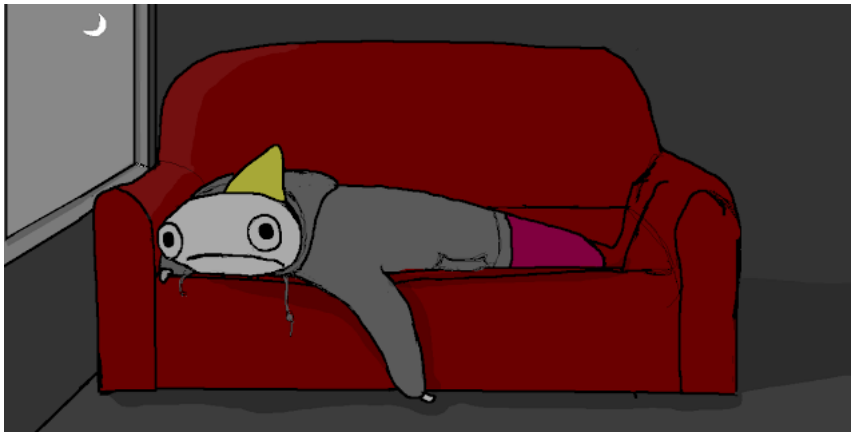
it's okay, fish...

it's gonna be
okay...

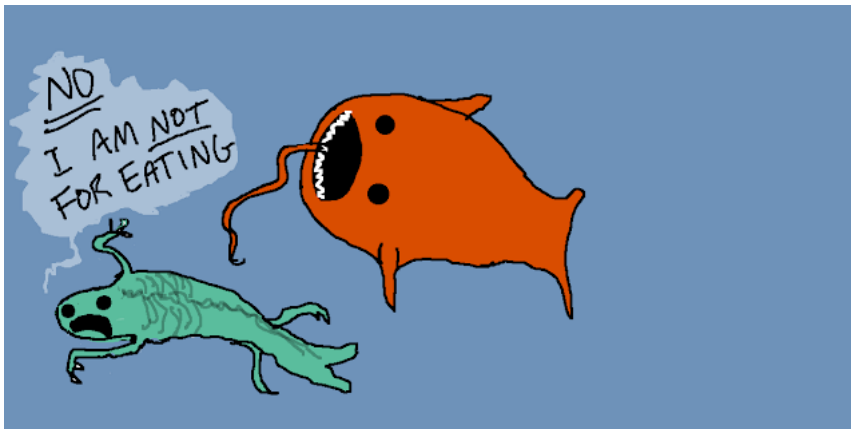


Perhaps it was because I lacked the emotional depth necessary to panic, or maybe my predicament didn't feel dramatic enough to make me suspicious, but I somehow managed to convince myself that everything was still under my control right up until I noticed myself wishing that nothing loved me so I wouldn't feel obligated to keep existing.

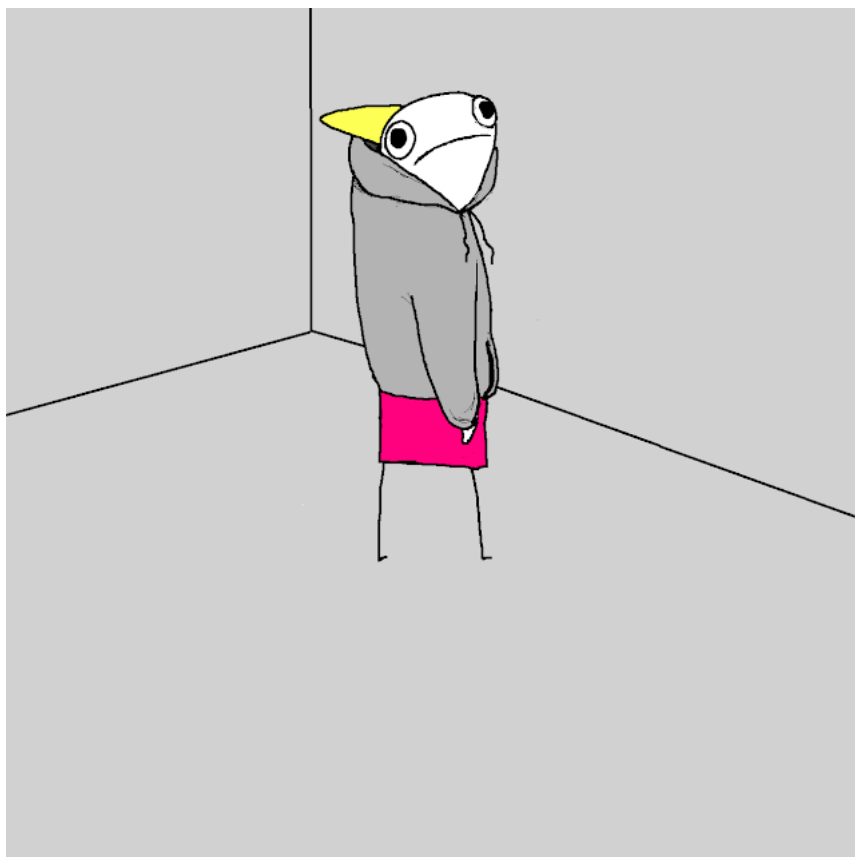




It's a strange moment when you realize that you don't want to be alive anymore. If I had feelings, I'm sure I would have felt surprised. I have spent the vast majority of my life actively attempting to survive. Ever since my most distant single-celled ancestor squiggled into existence, there has been an unbroken chain of things that wanted to stick around.



Yet there I was, casually wishing that I could stop existing in the same way you'd want to leave an empty room or mute an unbearably repetitive noise.



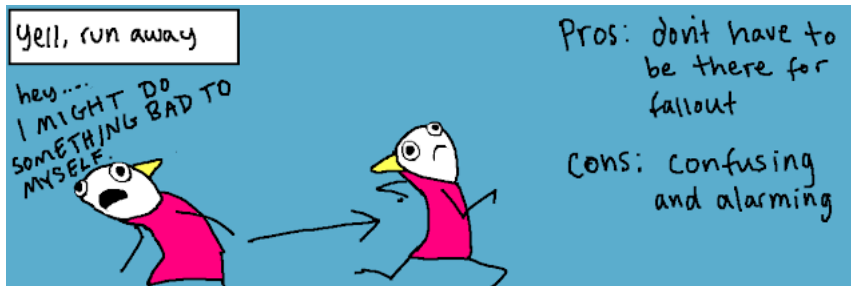
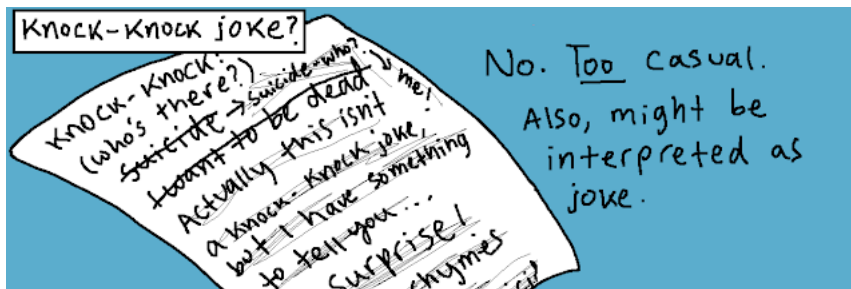
That wasn't the worst part, though. The worst part was deciding to keep going.



When I say that deciding to not kill myself was the worst part, I should clarify that I don't mean it in a retrospective sense. From where I am now, it seems like a solid enough decision. But at the time, it felt like I had been dragging myself through the most miserable, endless wasteland, and — far in the distance — I had seen the promising glimmer of a slightly less miserable wasteland. And for just a moment, I thought maybe I'd be able to stop and rest. But as soon as I arrived at the border of the less miserable wasteland, I found out that I'd have to turn around and walk back the other way.



Soon afterward, I discovered that there's no tactful or comfortable way to inform other people that you might be suicidal. And there's definitely no way to ask for help casually.



I didn't want it to be a big deal. However, it's an alarming subject. Trying to be nonchalant about it just makes it weird for everyone.



I was also extremely ill-prepared for the position of comforting people. The things that seemed reassuring at the time weren't necessarily comforting for others.



I had so very few feelings, and everyone else had so many, and it felt like they were having all of them in front of me at once. I didn't really know what to do, so I agreed to see a doctor so that everyone would stop having all of their feelings at me.



The next few weeks were a haze of talking to relentlessly hopeful people about my feelings that didn't exist so I could be prescribed medication that might help me have them again.

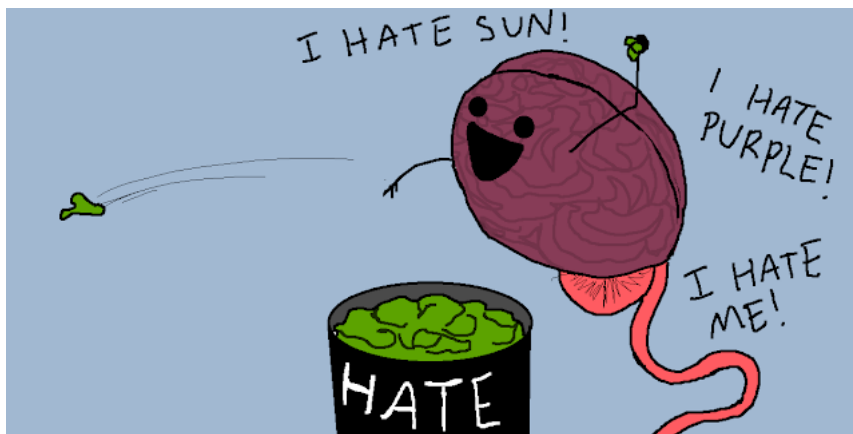


And every direction *was* bullshit for a really long time, especially up. The absurdity of working so hard to continue doing something you don't like can be overwhelming. And the longer it takes to feel different, the more it starts to seem like everything might actually be hopeless bullshit.



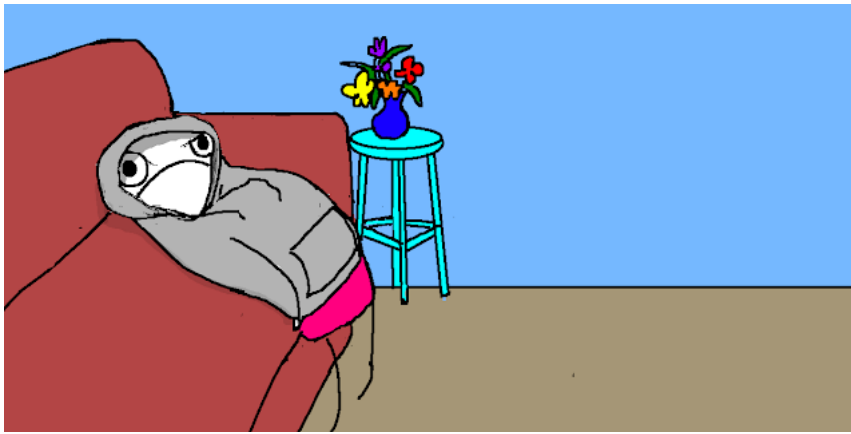
My feelings did start to return eventually. But not all of them came back, and they didn't arrive symmetrically.

I had not been able to care for a very long time, and when I finally started being able to care about things again, I HATED them. But hatred is technically a feeling, and my brain latched onto it like a child learning a new word.



Hating everything made all the positivity and hope feel even more unpalatable. The syrupy, over-simplified optimism started to feel almost offensive.

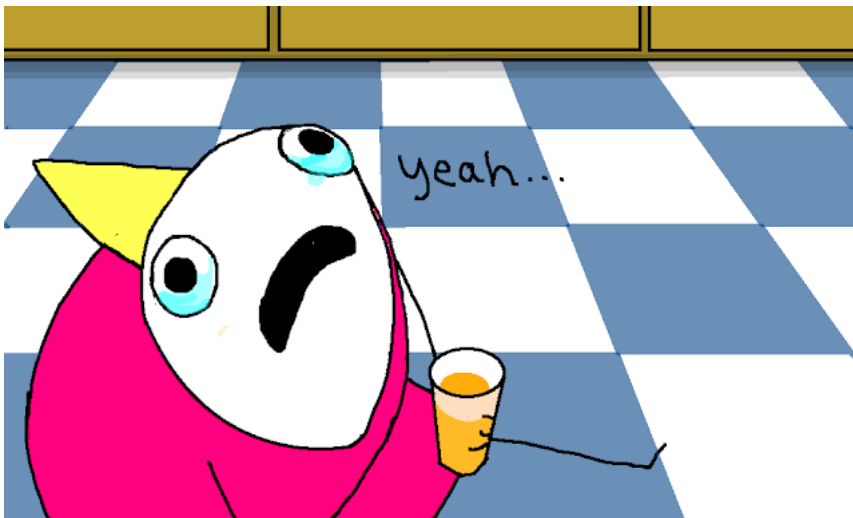
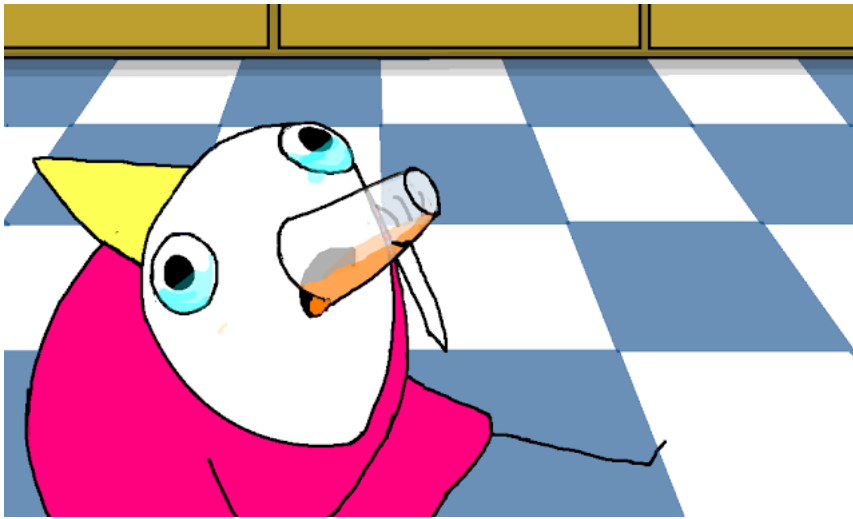




...but
STAY STRONG.
It gets
better!

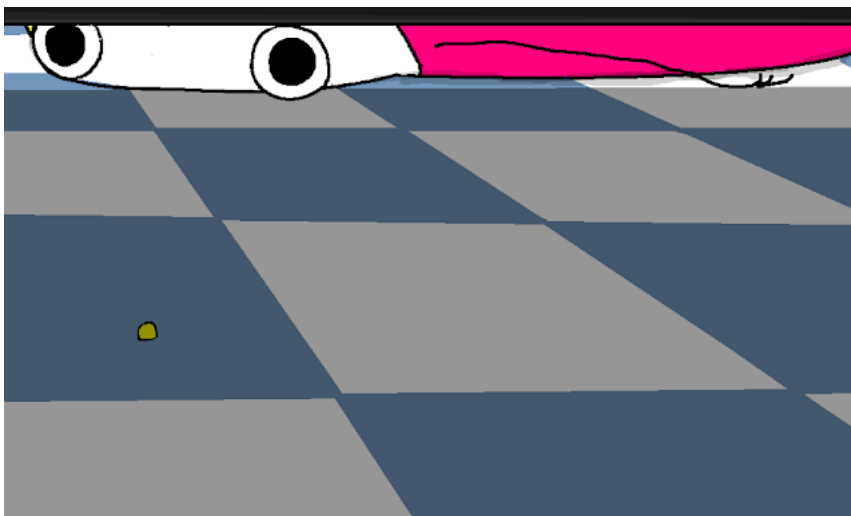


Thankfully, I rediscovered crying just before I got sick of hating things. I call this emotion "crying" and not "sadness" because that's all it really was. Just crying for the sake of crying. My brain had partially learned how to be sad again, but it took the feeling out for a joy ride before it had learned how to use the brakes or steer.

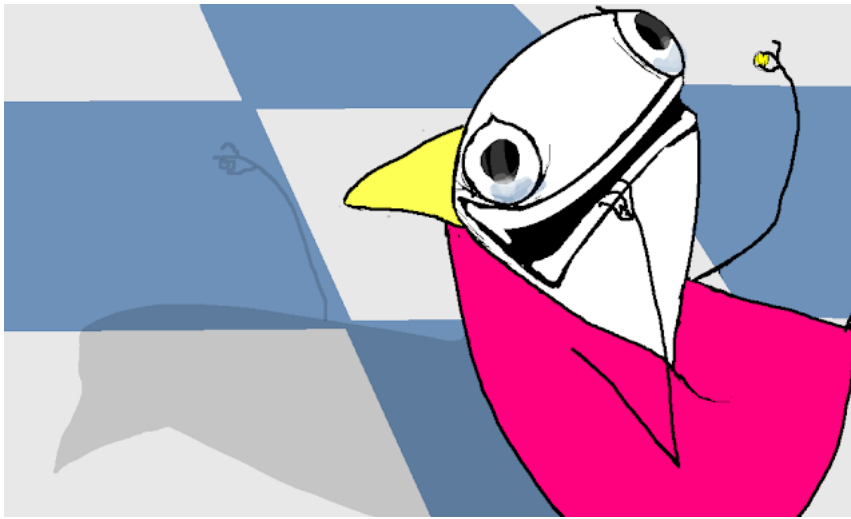




At some point during this phase, I was crying on the kitchen floor for no reason. As was common practice during bouts of floor-crying, I was staring straight ahead at nothing in particular and feeling sort of weird about myself. Then, through the film of tears and nothingness, I spotted a tiny, shriveled piece of corn under the refrigerator.

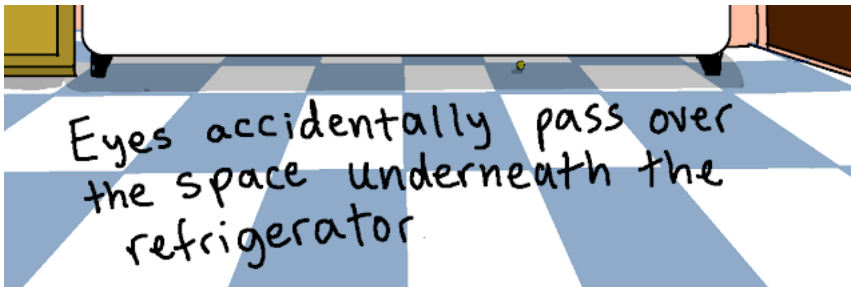


I don't claim to know why this happened, but when I saw the piece of corn, something snapped. And then that thing twisted through a few permutations of logic that I don't understand, and produced the most confusing bout of uncontrollable, debilitating laughter that I have ever experienced.

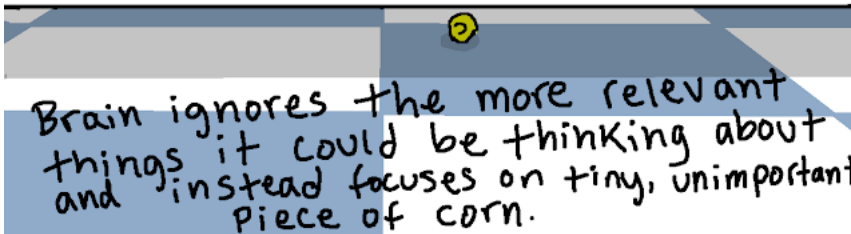


I had absolutely no idea what was going on.

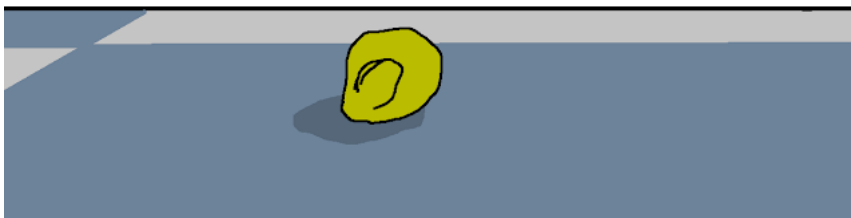
→ Why did the corn cause this to happen?

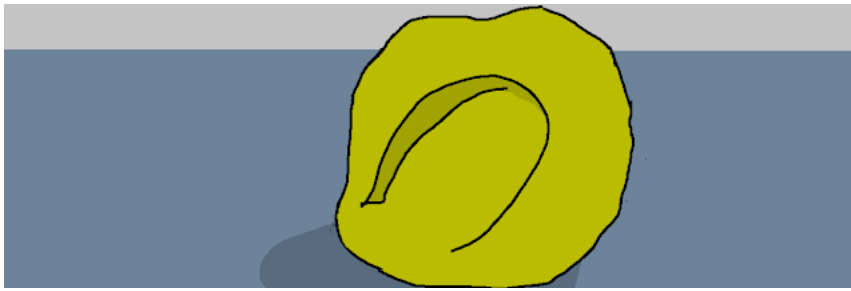


Eyes accidentally pass over the space underneath the refrigerator



Brain ignores the more relevant things it could be thinking about and instead focuses on tiny, unimportant piece of corn.





SOMETHING I DON'T UNDERSTAND OCCURS

Corn + floor = Cloorn?
[Carry the f], multiply by how alone the corn is, perform a twisting maneuver → generate laughter

Laughter happens.

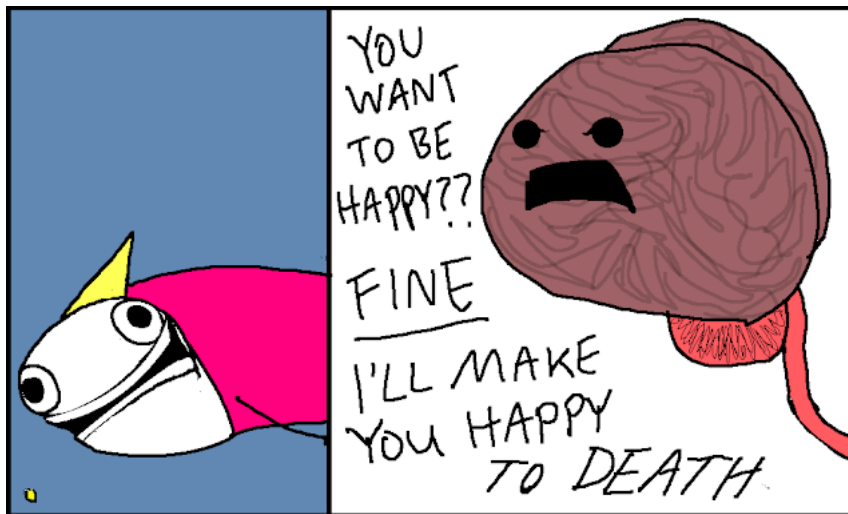
it is a surprise.

The element of surprise allows the laughter to circle back on itself ↻

→ CREATES INFINITE LAUGHTER LOOP ↻

Stupid tiny piece of corn
is now funniest thing
in universe.
Nothing is funnier than
dumb little piece of corn.

My brain had apparently been storing every unfelt scrap of happiness from the last nineteen months, and it had impulsively decided to unleash all of it at once in what would appear to be an act of vengeance.



That piece of corn is the funniest thing I have ever seen, and I cannot explain to anyone why it's funny. *I* don't even know why. If someone ever asks me "what was the exact moment where things started to feel slightly less shitty?" instead of telling a nice, heartwarming story about the support of the people who loved and believed in me, I'm going to have to tell them about the piece of corn. And then I'm going to have to try to explain that no, really, it was funny. Because, see, the way the corn was sitting on the floor... it was so alone... and it was just *sitting* there! And no matter how I explain it, I'll get the same, confused look. So maybe I'll try to show them the piece of corn - to see if they get it. They won't. Things will get even weirder.





Anyway, I wanted to end this on a hopeful, positive note, but, seeing as how my sense of hope and positivity is still shrouded in a thick layer of feeling like hope and positivity are bullshit, I'll just say this: Nobody can guarantee that it's going to be okay, but — and I don't know if this will be comforting to anyone else — the possibility exists that there's a piece of corn on a floor somewhere that will make you just as confused about why you are laughing as you have ever been about why you are depressed. And even if everything still seems like hopeless bullshit, maybe it's just *pointless* bullshit or *weird* bullshit or possibly not even bullshit.



I don't know.

But when you're concerned that the miserable, boring wasteland in front of you might stretch all the way into forever, not knowing feels strangely hope-like.

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POSTED BY ALLIE AT 8:55 AM