

Sunflowers

by Keezy Young

MOST PEOPLE
THINK MANIA IS
FUN





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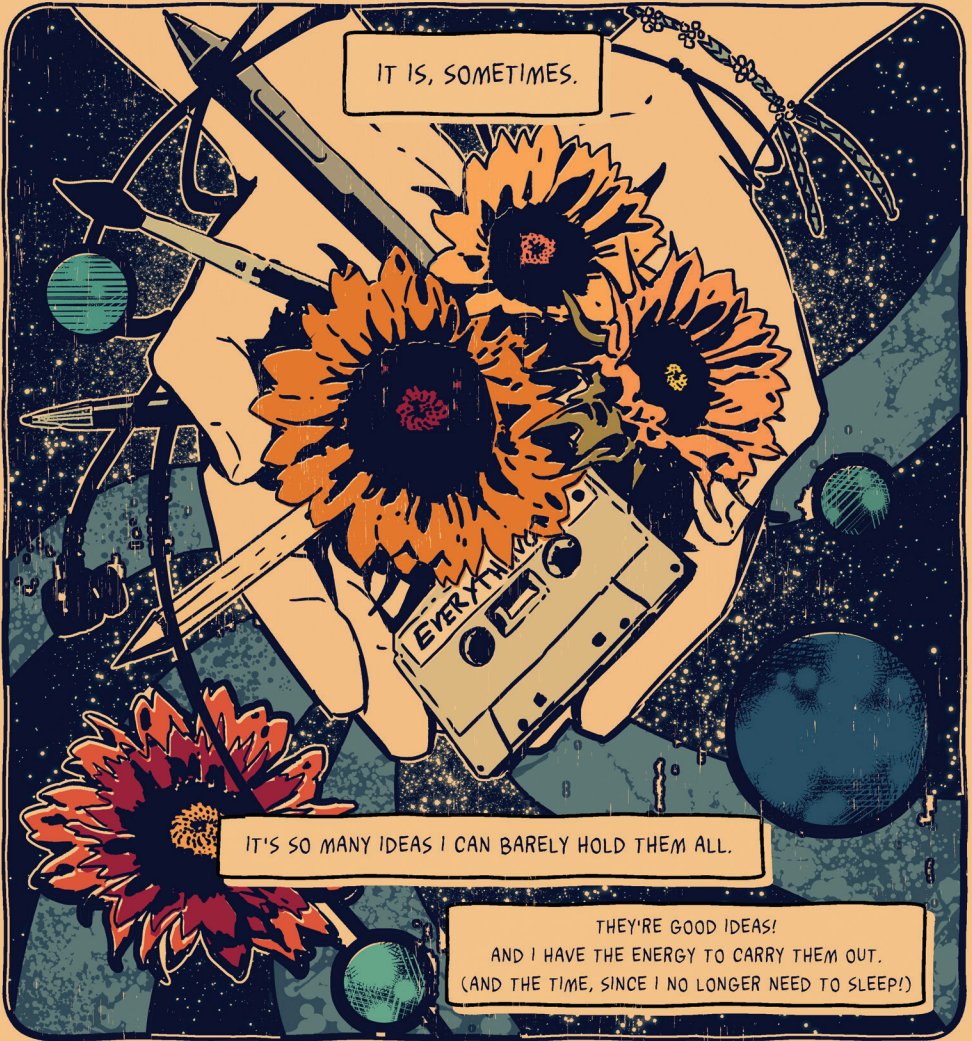
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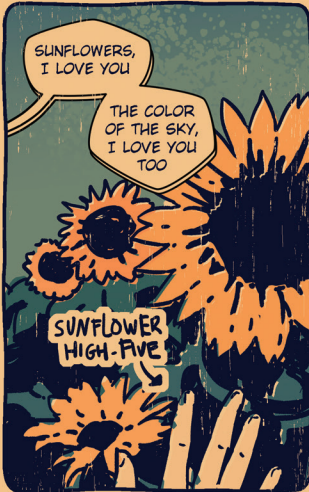
MOST PEOPLE THINK
MANIA IS
FUN.



IT IS, SOMETIMES.

IT'S SO MANY IDEAS I CAN BARELY HOLD THEM ALL.

THEY'RE GOOD IDEAS!
AND I HAVE THE ENERGY TO CARRY THEM OUT.
(AND THE TIME, SINCE I NO LONGER NEED TO SLEEP!)



SUNFLOWERS,
I LOVE YOU

THE COLOR
OF THE SKY,
I LOVE YOU
TOO

SUNFLOWER
HIGH-FIVE



TEARS
OF
STRONG
EMOTION

CASS ELLIOT
OF THE MAMAS AND
THE PAPAS, I
LOVE YOU



SOME
GUY I DON'T
KNOW

HELLO!
I LOVE
YOU

ALL MY DOUBTS AND ANXIETIES FLITTER AWAY.

THE WORLD HAS PROBLEMS, BUT I CAN SOLVE THEM.
(I WILL SOLVE THEM WITH LOVE AND KINDNESS AND COMICS.)

I'LL HAVE TO SKIP MY DAY JOB AND GENERALLY THE IDEA OF
MAKING AN INCOME TO DO THIS IMPORTANT WORK OF SAVING THE
WORLD WITH MY COMICS, BUT THAT WILL ALL WORK ITSELF OUT.

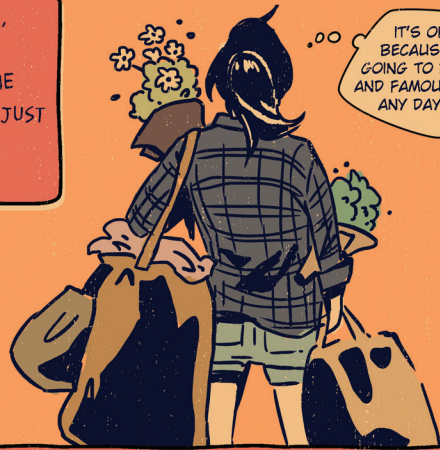


EXTREMELY
DRESSED
UP (for the
grocery store)

ALSO, EVERYONE IS MY FRIEND AND
I AM VERY PRETTY AND SMART AND FUNNY.
(NATURALLY, THIS WILL ALSO MAKE
THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE.)

*ACTUAL PICTURE OF ME! RARE!

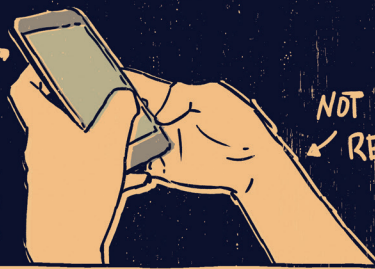
I REACH OUT TO EXES, COWORKERS,
OLD HIGH SCHOOL FRIENDS,
TEACHERS WHO DIDN'T EVEN LIKE ME
AND TRY TO CALL MY DOCTOR AT 2AM JUST
TO CHAT BECAUSE SHE'S LOVELY
AND I THINK IT'D BE NICE.



AND YEAH, I GO SHOPPING (A LOT) AND CLEAN MY APARTMENT (A LOT).

(FOR SOME REASON I ALSO REALLY WANT TO BECOME CATHOLIC?)

CATECHISMS



NOT
RELIGIOUS!

IF I COULD LIVE MY WHOLE LIFE HERE, I WOULD.

THIS PART IS BEAUTIFUL.
THIS PART IS PERFECT.*

* WE DON'T NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE
THE FALLOUT...YET.



IN THIS PART, NOTHING CAN GO WRONG,* EVERYTHING IS
WONDERFULLY, COSMICALLY CONNECTED, AND I CAN TAKE ON THE
WORLD. COLORS ARE BRIGHTER, MUSIC MORE VIVID, EVERY BREEZE
AND RAY OF SUN SPEAKS TRUTH AND LOVE TO ME.

*OH...IT VERY MUCH CAN.

HYPOMANIA: AN EPISODE LASTING AT LEAST 4 DAYS
(BUT POSSIBLY WEEKS OR MONTHS) IN WHICH YOU DISPLAY
A REVVED UP ENERGY OR ACTIVITY LEVEL, MOOD OR BEHAVIOR.
THE NEW "ENERGIZED YOU" IS RECOGNIZED BY OTHERS AS BEYOND
YOUR USUAL SELF.

HYPOMANIA IS A LESS SEVERE FORM OF MANIA.
IT DOES NOT REQUIRE HOSPITALIZATION OR INCLUDE PSYCHOSIS.

HYPOMANIA ISN'T FUN FOR EVERYONE.
BUT FOR ME...(USUALLY)...IT'S EUPHORIA.

DIAGNOSTICALLY THERE'S A LINE THAT GETS CROSSED SOMEWHERE,
WHERE **HYPOMANIA** TURNS TO **MANIA**. THE REALITY ISN'T SO CLEAR CUT.
I JUST KNOW THAT SOMETIMES

I GO CRAZY.



MOST PEOPLE THINK MANIA IS FUN.
IT IS, SOMETIMES.

IT'S EUPHORIA.

BUT IT'S ALSO
FIRE.

IT'S BOUNDLESS CREATIVITY,
AND THEN IT'S TOO MANY IDEAS
RACING ALL AT ONCE.

IT'S CHEERFULLY WANDERING FOR HOURS, BAREFOOT, UNTIL
MY ANKLES BLEED, AND MY KNEES COLLAPSE, AND POPPING
A FEW ADVIL SO I CAN DO IT SOME MORE
(THERE'S NO STAYING STILL THERE IS NO STAYING STILL)

IT'S WRITING HUNDREDS OF PAGES OF UNHINGED
NONSENSE THAT I FIND LATER IN UNNAMED DOCUMENTS,
AND QUIETLY DELETE, GLAD I AT LEAST GOT
DISTRACTED BEFORE I SENT THEM TO ANYONE ELSE.

IT'S TWIRLING IN THE STREET IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT
AND TALKING OUT LOUD TO THE SUNFLOWERS AND STARS.
(I'M SPECIALLY CHOSEN FOR THIS SPIRITUAL DUTY. HOW CUTE!)

IT'S ALSO TRESPASSING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT
AND HIDING (OR NAPPING) IN PEOPLE'S GARDENS.
SCREAMING AT CARS AND STREET LIGHTS TO
LEAVE ME ALONE, BECAUSE I KNOW THEY'RE MY ENEMIES.
IT'S WALKING INTO TRAFFIC BECAUSE I HAVE TO
PROVE TO THEM I'M NOT AFRAID.
IT'S LISTENING TO MY NEIGHBOR THROUGH THE WALL
AND CHECKING FOR THE DEVICES HE'S PLANTED. HE
WON'T STOP HUMMING, WHY WON'T HE STOP HUMMING?
HE'S TRYING TO DRIVE ME
MAD
ON PURPOSE, AND I DON'T KNOW WHY.

PSYCHOSIS

AND THEN THERE'S THE WEIRD STUFF.

MELTING
WALLS

DARTING BLACK
SHADOW CREATURES THAT
TRIP ME AND RUSH AT
MY HEAD

VOICES SHOUTING
MY NAME.

CRAWLING BUGS ALL
OVER MY ARMS AND LEGS

MY DOCTORS GAVE ME
BAD DRUGS TO MAKE
ME SICK ON PURPOSE

CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN VOICES THAT I
CAN'T STOP LISTENING TO, EVEN THOUGH
WHAT THEY'RE SAYING IS NONSENSE. I KNOW
IF I JUST LISTEN HARDER I'LL BE ABLE TO
FIGURE OUT WHAT IT MEANS

THE SHADOW PEOPLE

SIGNS, SIGNS EVERYWHERE.
I HAVE TO PAY ATTENTION.

MALEVOLENT ENTITIES DISGUISE
THEMSELVES AS STREET LIGHTS, DEMONS,
ALIENS, THE GOVERNMENT. IT COULD BE
ANYTHING. BUT THEY'RE DANGEROUS AND
THEY ARE WATCHING ME

BAD FACES IN EVERY-
THING

WHISPERING,
ALL THE TIME

LITTLE
MOURNFUL
CAT MEOWS

THERE'S A SPOT ON MY ARM. IT WANTS ME TO DIG IT OUT. IT
ALSO WANTS ME TO WEAR THE SHORTS ON THE LEFT OF THE
DRAWER. I DON'T KNOW WHY IT WANTS THIS BUT I KNOW
IT DOES, AND I DO IT ANYWAY (I WANT IT TO LIKE ME)

GHOSTS IN THE SHADOWS
STARING AT ME WITH EYES
THAT AREN'T RIGHT. EVERYTHING
IS ALWAYS STARING AT ME

I NEVER KNEW IT WASN'T NORMAL.
THIS HAPPENS TO EVERYBODY SOMETIMES,
DOESN'T IT?

THIS CAN LAST FOR WEEKS. SOMETIMES MONTHS. IT'S SLEEPING 5

THEN 3

2

1

0

IT'S DOING EVERYTHING AT HYPERSPEED

AND THEN IT'S CRASHING INTO WALLS AND STILL GOING ANYWAY.

ALL THOSE IMPORTANT THINGS I NEED TO DO?
THERE'S NOT ENOUGH TIME TO DO THEM.

I WANT TO GO FASTER, FASTER, FASTER.
I HAVE TO.
BUT NOTHING ELSE IS KEEPING UP.

IT'S PANICKING BECAUSE THE THOUGHTS ARE TOO MUCH AND THE WORLD
THAT WAS BEAUTIFUL AND VIVID AND COLORFUL IS TOO BRIGHT AND LOUD AND
ANNOYING AND SLOW AND I CAN'T STAND IT, ALL I WANT TO DO IS STOP
THE SPINNING BECAUSE THE WORLD MIGHT BE SLOW BUT I'M GOING SO FAST
I FEEL NAUSEATED, I FEEL

INSANE

(I TRY TO REMIND MYSELF OF ALL THE REASONS I DON'T WANT TO DIE, BUT THE PROBLEM
ISN'T THAT I WANT TO DIE. THE PROBLEM IS THAT I WANT TO LIVE TOO MUCH
FOR THE WORLD TO CONTAIN ME, AND I NEED TO BREAK FREE OF MYSELF
BEFORE IT KILLS ME.)



20% OF PEOPLE WITH BIPOLAR DISORDER DIE OF SUICIDE.
THAT'S ONE OUT OF EVERY FIVE OF US.

I'M LUCKY TO BE ALIVE. I'M ALSO LUCKY I'VE NEVER
HAD THE COPS CALLED ON ME WHEN I'M MANIC.



SO YES

(HYPO)MANIA IS FUN.

SOMETIMES.



UNTIL IT ISN'T.

AND WHAT GOES UP,
MUST COME DOWN.



UNTIL IT ENDS.

UNTIL I WAKE UP ONE DAY, MONTHS LATER,
AND THE DARKNESS RECEDES,
LEAVING ME WRENCHED AND BATTERED,
BUT BETTER.



I FORGET WHAT IT WAS LIKE
TO BE HIGH, TO BE LOW.

IT'S THERE, BUT IT'S LIKE
SOMEONE ELSE LIVED IT. LIKE A MOVIE
YOU FORGOT YOU WATCHED.



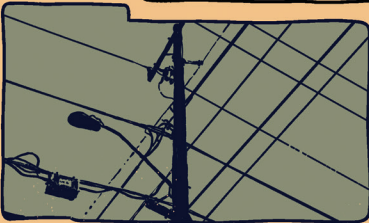
(MEMORY PROBLEMS ARE COMMON WITH BIPOLAR.).



I GO TO WORK,
I CHAT WITH FRIENDS,
I CALL MY MOM AND DAD.
(THEY ARE SO CAREFUL WHEN THEY
ASK ME HOW I'M DOING, BUT I DON'T
REALLY KNOW WHY, BECAUSE I'M
FINE?)



IT'S CALLED EUTHYミア; THE NORMAL PART, WHERE I'M JUST LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE,
(SORT OF). IT'S WHERE I SPEND MOST OF MY TIME.



BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN IT'S EASY.

BECAUSE I KNOW (EVEN BEFORE I KNEW) IT WILL ALL HAPPEN ALL OVER AGAIN.

EVERY EXCITEMENT
EVERY SADNESS
EVERY NIGHT I LOSE A LITTLE SLEEP
EVERY TIME I GET A LITTLE IRRITABLE
EVERY GRIEF, EVERY JOY
EVERY FEELING I EVER FEEL

IS THIS IT?

average mood (

F M A M J J

WILL I HURTLE INTO THE STRATOSPHERE
WHERE EVERYTHING WILL BE WONDERFUL
UNTIL IT ISN'T
AND THEN FALL FROM HEAVEN
AND BREAK ALL MY BONES

A S O N D

AGAIN

AND AGAIN?

171

22

44

32



Therapy

PSYCHIATRY
APPOINTMENTS

MEDICATION

Finding Community with other sufferers

(THE ANSWER IS YES, EVEN IF I STAY ON MY MEDICATION, EVEN IF I DO EVERYTHING RIGHT, I PROBABLY WILL HAVE MORE EPISODES. THERE IS NO CURE. STABILITY IS POSSIBLE, BETTER IS POSSIBLE, BUT YOU CAN'T MEDICATE (OR MEDITATE) YOUR WAY OUT OF THIS ILLNESS. IT WILL BE WITH ME MY WHOLE LIFE.)

Journaling
CONSISTENT BLOODWORK (TO MONITOR MEDICATION LEVELS)

MEDITATION
(It does help some people)

Exercise + Eating Well
(I know, I know, but it doesn't hurt*)
*Unless you're manic. In which case exercise can make mania worse.

Managing Stress



Forgiving yourself

BEING CAREFUL AROUND SUBSTANCES

Dealing with the aftermath of episodes (financially, legally, socially, physically, and emotionally)

MAINTAINING A GOOD SOCIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM



GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP (THIS IS CRITICAL)

SYMPTOM AND MOOD TRACKING



I KNOW I'M NOT DANGEROUS
(AT LEAST TO OTHERS).

I KNOW PEOPLE MIGHT THINK I'M SCARY,
UNTRUSTWORTHY, PSYCHO, ATTENTION-SEEKING,
ANGRY, MANIPULATIVE, AND NARCISSTIC,
AND I KNOW THAT I'M NONE OF THOSE THINGS.

I KNOW YOUR EX WAS ABUSIVE AND
YOU THINK IT WAS BECAUSE OF HIS
ILLNESS (OR YOU ASSUME HE HAD THIS
ILLNESS BECAUSE HE WAS ABUSIVE;
THAT ONE'S ACTUALLY WORSE)
BUT HE WAS JUST A
SHITTY ASSHOLE. SORRY.

AND NO, IT'S NOT JUST 'MOODINESS' (BIPOLAR
EPISODES LAST FOR DAYS TO MONTHS, NOT MINUTES
TO HOURS, AND WE'RE NOT CONSTANTLY IN ONE).

I KNOW I'M NOT A CHEATER, OR A LIAR,
OR AN EGOTISTICAL MONSTER, AND
MY ALLEGIANCES AND OPINIONS DON'T
TURN ON A DIME.

- Q can a bipolar person **kill**
- Is bipolar disorder an excuse for being evil?
- Q are bipolar people **manipulative**
- Q can a bipolar person **ever be normal**

I KNOW IT ISN'T THAT I JUST NEED TO TRY HARDER TO CONTROL MYSELF.
I KNOW THAT PEOPLE THINK THEY KNOW WHAT MANIA IS BECAUSE THEY'VE BEEN
DRUNK, OR HIGH. THEY'RE JUST TRYING TO CONNECT, BUT THEY HAVE NO IDEA.

Do manic episodes lead to violence?

Q are bipolar people **crazy**

can bipolar people **love**

Q can **you trust** a bipolar person

Does bipolar make you controlling?

Are bipolar narcissistic?

can **someone with bipolar disorder live alone**

Are bipolar emotionally abusive?

BUT THAT'S THE EASY STUFF.

Is bipolar disorder a curse?

Q can a bipolar person **have a healthy relationship**

What percentage of bipolar people cheat?

can bipolar people **work**

How do you deal with a violent bipolar person?

Does bipolar make you promiscuous?

WHAT I DON'T KNOW IS THIS:

IS THIS THE REAL ME? OR ARE MY EPISODES PART OF ME, TOO?

DO I FIGHT THE LOWS TODAY, OR THE HIGHS?

SHOULD I BE MORE ___ OR LESS ___?

AM I SOMETHING IN BETWEEN, OR AM I EVERYTHING AT ONCE?

THIS IS THE PART I STRUGGLE WITH MOST OUTSIDE OF MY EPISODES.

NOT THE STIGMA (THOUGH IT'S SEVERE), OR THE LABEL (THOUGH IT CAN FEEL LIKE A BURNING BRAND), OR THE SIDE EFFECTS FROM MY MEDICATION (WHICH CAN BE LIFE-THREATENING), OR THE FACT THAT I'LL HAVE TO TAKE IT EVERY DAY FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE. SOME PEOPLE EXPERIENCE LOW-KEY DEPRESSION EVEN WHEN THEY'RE EUTHYMIC, BUT MY BASELINE IS HAPPY AND HOPEFUL. I HAVE LOTS OF FRIENDS, A FAMILY WHO LOVES ME. FOR EVERY DREAM I'VE HAD TO GIVE UP, I'VE FOUND A WAY TO MAKE A DIFFERENT ONE COME TO LIFE.
I'M GOOD WITH WHERE I'M AT.

IT'S THIS: THE FEAR, ANXIETY, THE STRESS OF KNOWING

THAT I CAN'T TRUST MY OWN HAPPINESS.

THAT I WILL, AT SOME POINT, HIT ANOTHER MANIA, OR ANOTHER DEPRESSION.

THAT IT COULD HAPPEN ANY DAY, WITHOUT ANY REAL TRIGGER OR WARNING.

THAT I MIGHT NOT SURVIVE IT THIS TIME.

THAT I COULD BE SYMPTOM-FREE FOR YEARS AND STILL HAVE TO WALK THAT BALANCE BEAM EVERY DAY, JUST IN CASE.

ME, AGE 4,
FINDING OUT THAT
I'M SCARED OF
HEIGHTS →

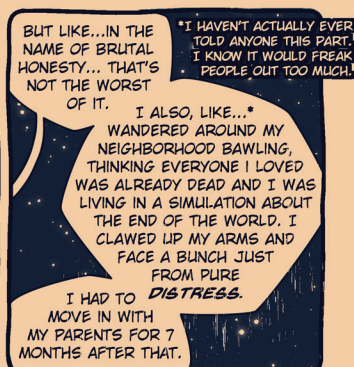
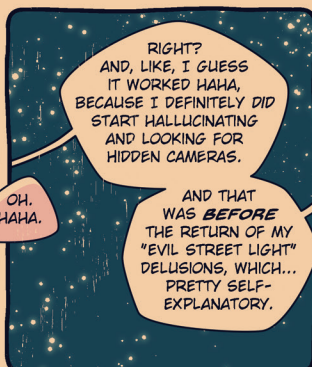
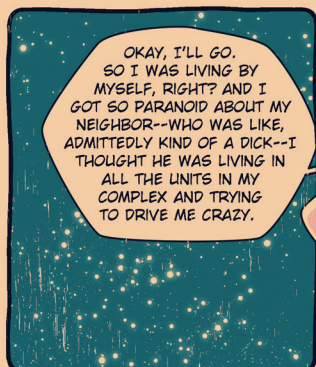
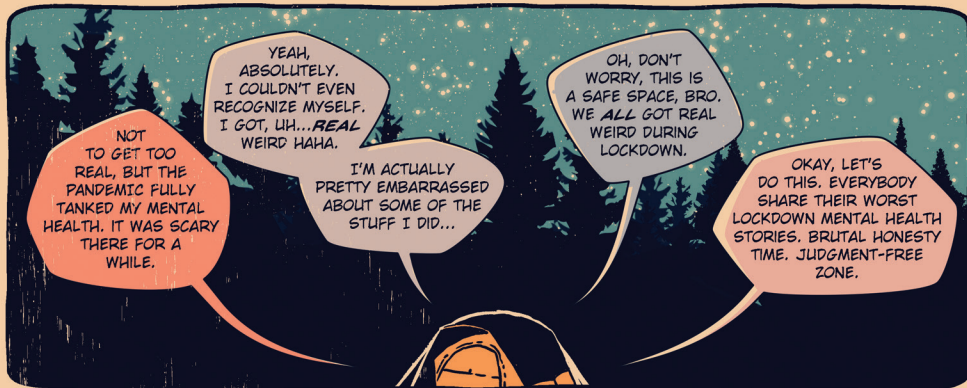


KEEPING AN EYE ON YOURSELF IS EXHAUSTING.

BUT MOST OF ALL, BIPOLAR DISORDER IS VERY, VERY LONELY.

AUTOBIO COMICS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE RELATABLE, MAYBE EVEN FUNNY. IT'S HOW WE CONNECT TO EACH OTHER, EVEN WHEN WE DON'T SUFFER THE SAME PROBLEMS.

BUT BIPOLAR ISN'T A RELATABLE ILLNESS FOR MOST PEOPLE. AND EVEN WHEN IT IS FUNNY, IT'S EITHER SOMEBODY LAUGHING AT ME, OR SOMEBODY LAUGHING UNCOMFORTABLY.



THE AWKWARDEST SILENCE MAN HAS EVER KNOWN

(I DEFINITELY DON'T RESENT ANYBODY FOR THIS. PEOPLE JUST DON'T KNOW HOW THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO RESPOND. BUT IT'S ISOLATING. KNOWING THAT EVEN IN MENTAL HEALTH SPACES, EVEN AMONG LOVED ONES, YOUR EXPERIENCES ARE TOO SCARY OR UNACCEPTABLE TO TALK ABOUT WITHOUT MAKING IT WEIRD.)



BUT I WANT TO KEEP TRYING TO CONNECT ANYWAY.

I HID MY MENTAL ILLNESS FOR SO MANY YEARS. I WAS ALWAYS TERRIFIED SOMEONE MIGHT FIND OUT. I DIDN'T LET ANYBODY GET CLOSE. BACK THEN IF YOU'D TOLD ME I'D BE MAKING COMICS ABOUT IT, I PROBABLY WOULD HAVE THROWN UP, THEN BEEN SO ENGULFED IN SHAME AND FEAR I'D NEVER HAVE GOTTEN UP OFF THE BATHROOM FLOOR AGAIN.

SOMETIMES I THINK I MUST HAVE REALLY LOST IT, TO BE PUTTING THIS STUFF OUT THERE FOR THE WORLD TO SEE. (ONE SIGN OF MANIA IS OVERSHARING AND POOR IMPULSE CONTROL. IT'S NOT AN UNREASONABLE WORRY.)

BUT I DON'T WANT TO HIDE ANYMORE.

I THINK THAT'S HOW I MAKE PEACE WITH THIS. BY BEING AS MUCH MYSELF AS I CAN BE, WHEN I CAN BE.

AND MAYBE IF I SHARE A LITTLE BIT OF WHAT IT'S LIKE,
SOMEONE OUT THERE WILL REALIZE THAT I'M NOT A NIGHTMARE
JUST BECAUSE I EXPERIENCE ONE SOME OF THE TIME.



✿ Afterword ✿

Living with bipolar disorder can be very hard. It can also be amazing, and rewarding, and filled with love and wonder and creativity (and I don't mean because of our manic episodes)! But it is, nonetheless, difficult. The illness itself, the treatment for it, and the fallout and recovery from episodes are all very, very hard.

But what makes it inarguably harder is how misunderstood and maligned bipolar is. Everybody **thinks** they know what it is, but only 31% can name even a single symptom, let alone identify it when they see it. And while the decrease in stigma around most mental illness is cause for celebration, for those of us with psychosis, it has actually gotten **worse** over the past three decades.

We obviously have a long way to go. People with bipolar (and other psychotic illnesses like schizoaffective and schizophrenia) deserve the same love, hope, and respect afforded to everyone else; we deserve a world where people don't shy away from us or use our diagnoses as insults.

I wrote this comic partly out of frustration, but also out of hope. I may not be able to change anything overnight, but maybe I can help a few more people understand a little bit more about what it's like to live with bipolar disorder, so that we can fight the hatred of it and misinformation about it together. I have hope that being open about it will help others to feel less alone, and maybe even safe enough to talk about their own experiences (because we **are** all different). And I have hope that people will feel a little closer to their loved ones who might be suffering in isolation.

Finally, I have hope that reading my story will help people have a little more empathy for those of us who are less lucky than I am; the people with bipolar disorder who end up in jail, or homeless, or gone. We are all just people, not monsters, or tragedies. We **all** deserve hope.



Resources



Note that many of these resources cater to both bipolar and schizophrenia; this is partly because our illnesses exist on a spectrum with a great deal of overlap in symptoms, stigma, and treatment, but most importantly to be inclusive toward schizoaffective disorder, a condition with both mood episodes and additional psychosis outside of mood episodes.

If you're trying to help a loved one, the **NAMI Resource Directory** contains over 600 national mental health resources identified by peers and families as helpful, and is a good place to start.

Helplines

National 24-hour Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: 988

Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741-741

NAMI Helplines: 1-800-950-6264 or info@nami.org

The Trevor Project: 1-866-488-7386 or text START to 678-678

SAMHSA National Helpline: 1-800-662-4357

Organizations

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

Students with Psychosis

International Bipolar Foundation

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Schizophrenia Alliance

The Hearing Voices Network

Online Peer Support

Bipolar + schizoaffective subs on Reddit

Bipolarbears Discord

StuffThatWorks

Stories and Education

BPHope

The Mighty

Tracy Marks on YouTube and TikTok

Living Well With Schizophrenia on YouTube and TikTok


A Bipolar, a Schizophrenic, and a Podcast

An Unquiet Mind by Kay Redfield-Jamison

Rock Steady: Brilliant Advice from my Bipolar Life by Ellen Forney



KEEZY YOUNG is a queer cartoonist who lives in Seattle, Washington. They write and draw short comics and YA graphic novels, including *Taproot* (2017/2022) with Oni Press, and *Hello Sunshine* (2025) with Little, Brown.

A stylized illustration featuring a large tree with dark, swirling branches on the left and a yellow goat with horns in the bottom left corner. The background is a mix of teal and yellow. The text is centered in the teal area.

An autobiographical
comic about living with
BIPOLAR I DISORDER.

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