

Mental Health + Addiction



In a world teetering on the brink of collective madness, one could argue that sanity itself is a myth—a myth as elusive as peace. Beyond the mundane march of our daily lives unfurls a cacophony at the edge of perception; the persistent buzz of societal noise, seeping in like an unshakable melody, constantly chewing at the edges of our sanity, cloaking us in layers of superficial judgment.

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We are all but novices, masquerading as experts in the craft of dictating what's best for others—what's best for the world, for our very survival. Yet, within this arrogance, one can't help but wonder: What do we truly understand?

As I venture through the city streets, the desolation is palpable. We avert our gaze from the suffering we pass, denying our silent role in fostering this dystopian scene. Far too often, we choose to dissect an individual's torment as though it were something to be understood and solved from a distance, as if suffering could be quantified, sliced so finely that it becomes invisible.

For those engulfed in pain, their cries for help become an act of sanity in an insane world, a clarion call for compassion, begging us to awaken and act.

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Yet, we stand immobilized. We recoil into the solace of self-absorption, where the world's dissonances fade to a mere bass line, humming in the background of our consciousness.

"They've done this to themselves," some would muse.

"It's mental illness. Drug problems. They're just damaged."

They were once children.

Think of the children.

I hear the stale dialogues of disillusioned middle-aged men, waxing lyrical about the latest hockey escapades of our local team, diverting the focus from the raw wounds of homelessness to the sanitized halls of institutionalization – as if sweeping suffering under the rug absolved us of responsibility.

Meanwhile, celebrities serenade us with tales of heartbreak (Swift) and fortune (Ohatani), their wealth a stark contrast to the countless indigent souls lining the route to the stadiums where they perform.

Rivulets of human decay flow silently by – men and women driven to numb their existence against the biting cold and relentless hunger. For them, the allure of another hit, another fleeting escape, is an understandable reprieve.

Our collective apathy is as evident as the automated (by automated, I mean by begging) door that swishes open at the 7-Eleven – only on the days when it falters do we notice its existence, much like the destitute who once stood there.

Not long ago, I loathed those interactions. Now, empathy tugs at my conscience, compelling me to ponder how I might endure if I too were cast into the chasm of street life. What would become of me?

I have no answer.

At the park opposite my abode, a playground once teeming with innocence is now patrolled by officers, guardians of societal norms, ready to whisk away any suffering soul who dares tarnish the sanctity of childhood with their presence.

Our cultural script is starkly black and white: fail to thrive, and you're tacitly stamped with the label of mental illness or addiction. The subtleties of human struggle are distilled into convenient binaries.

News reports tout government initiatives—dental care for octogenarians claiming the headlines—but I’m left wondering if such token offerings truly make a dent in the vast expanse of human need. Is it enough?

It’s the bare minimum—the very bare minimum, despite my loathing for that word ‘very.’

And so, I question my own mental fortitude.
With unemployment breathing down my neck,
threatening to cast me into the abyss of homelessness, I
can't help but suspect that an encounter with that void
may push me toward the very vices we stigmatize.

"You're stronger than that," they say.

But am I?

Indeed, how can any of us escape the threat of mental
distress?

Take my tale, for example. I entered this world in a place where unwed mothers were ostracized, their ‘bastard’ offspring swiftly torn away, only to be trafficked into adoption, all in the name of rectifying their ‘error’ and protecting the façade of family and church.

It was reflective of the times.

The stigma of mental illness is deeply woven into our history, casting long shadows over my lineage. Forced to live a life founded on deception regarding my origins, the truth eventually surfaced, leaving me to assemble the fragmented pieces of my identity, alone.

Did my family do their best by concealing the truth?

No, they did far from their best.

All I ever did was come into being.

Despite carving out a semblance of life for myself, there always seemed to be a void, a missing link whose absence left me perennially susceptible—exposed to exploitation and betrayal under the guise of fostering personal growth.

I tire of granting amnesty to toxic friends and corrupt employers who exploit my inherent insecurities, who take me for granted time and time again, all the while pretending it’s for my own good.

It’s time I muster the courage to reject their venomous bonds.

As my family's world teeters on the precipice of collapse, the media paints a narrative of self-infliction—ignoring the systemic rot, the societal schisms that cast the less fortunate aside with cold indifference.

We need a societal reawakening.

Ironically, I do harbour a fondness for the pop anthems of Taylor Swift and the athletic prowess of baseball giants like Shohei Ohtani. They entertain, they distract.

Yet, I can't shake the correlation between their stardom and the shadow it casts on the ever-growing epidemic of societal neglect.

A wraithlike specter drifts past, its ethereal form barely disturbing the world around it, as if woven from the fabric of settings long forgotten. This apparition, an unwelcome companion tethered to my very soul since my first breath, eludes me in a chilling silent dance. A pursuit beckons me, its origin obscure, yet a whisper within insists it might be the lingering essence of the father I never knew.

The morrow brings the frozen embrace of December 12th, a day marked by grim anniversaries.

It is the haunting echo of the winter's day when I witnessed the life flicker out of my mother's eyes (1987) for a harrowing first time.

That same cursed date in 2020 severed the last familial bond with the death of my last-living aunt (sister).

And a year prior, the shadows of December claimed an old flatmate of mine, snatched by fate's cruel hands a decades before his time.

Amid the ruins of my peace, I often ponder my own state of being.

Am I okay?

The answer crashes through me like the winter's bite.

No.

And yet, amidst this tapestry of loss and spectral hauntings, Ohatani basks in the relentless flood of fortune, reaping \$133.18 each ceaseless minute, an opulent river that flows without end.

He had better pick up the lunch tab.

I wonder what he did this morning?

I wrote this.

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TO BE CONTINUED

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