

The Decadent Saints

By

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She glides lightly across the deserted, candle lit stage. Spinning, turning, floating on the points of her toes. The song is something classic. I've heard it before, lots of times, but fuck me if I could tell you the name of it. Her face is a calm mask of serenity.

No worry lines across the forehead.
Her teeth don't grind.
Her nose don't snuffle.
Her cheeks don't flush, don't twitch.

No addict fidgeting can be seen in her fingers, no compulsive scratching her head. No. No, in this moment she is nothing but grace personified. She is love in motion. She is innocence stepping in time to music.

My love for her is endless. I curse the end of the song, the break of the reverie, the fall back into our lives, our decisions, our consequences. Vacations, in whatever form they take, always end too soon.

Her tiny feet make tiny slapping noises across the floor as she comes back to us, only to collapse like a rag and drop her head into my lap.

"Is it ready yet?" She muffles through my jeans. She's starting to hurt. We all are. We're supposed to cherish this time. The time before. The time in between. The time we are apart from our calling. The time we are mortal. Whatever, I hate this time. It fills me with nothing but doubt. The cause, the calling, the goal, our souls, their souls, it all feels like bullshit, stupid adolescent bullshit. I just want my fix. I want my share of the sin. Let me take it, absorb it, feel it, taste it, then all will be clear again. Clarity is key.

Like a good monk, John dutifully prepares our fixes at the altar. 13mg of pure white salvation mixed and pulled into 13 perfectly measured syringes resting on their plungers with 13 stainless steel 23 gauge needles pointing straight to heaven.

We all stare at the display, the tiny spiked poison towers aligned semi-circle around the flickering, fluttering glow of the oil lamp. We all want it. We all pretend we don't. We pretend not to stare. We pretend not to notice each other pretending not to stare. But, we know better. We try to fight it, and for the most part, I think we're doing pretty good.

You see the whole point of the whole thing is not to want any of this. We're supposed to be martyrs. We're supposed to be saints. We're supposed to do this with reluctance.

You can label me the agnostic all you want, but I call bullshit.

Regardless, we have to wait. We wait for Michael. The King. The Savior. The bastard that got us all into this mess.

You can label me the blasphemer all you want, but I call bullshit.

It's not that I don't want to believe, I really did in the beginning.

It's not that I don't see the point to all of it.

It's not that I lack the strength.

It's not that I lack the trust.

It's not that I lack the faith.

It's not that I lack the love.

It's just that I don't think we're all as holy as we think we are.

You can label me the Judas all you want, but I call bullshit.

Ok, so maybe I'm lying just a little. But can you blame me? Seriously? From your perspective, I'm just a stupid kid following the words of another stupid kid, or maybe I'm just a stupid boy trailing on the skirt of some stupid girl. Either way, I look like an idiot. But, would you be any different? Really? Think back. Think back to when you thought you knew it all. Think back to when you had all the answers, when you knew who you were.

Remember how stupid you were?

Remember how everyone warned you against it?

Remember how, deep in your soul, you knew this was a terrible idea, but, all be damned if anyone was going to tell you different?

Well guess what? I was there, two months ago. The curse/blessing of going to the absolute extreme with such ideals is that you reach that ever so sought out 'wisdom that comes with age' with psychotic rapidness.

What you've looked for the last 15 years I've found in the last eight weeks.

It's not magical.

It's not spiritual.

It's not enlightening.

It's death.

I have no faith. I admit that. They do, and I envy them. I've read the bible, fuck I've studied it. Studied it like a scholar studies Chaucer. But found nothing, nothing even close to what these guys feel. It sucks.

I'm strung out. I look like shit. I'm dirty, my clothes are rotting off me, and I stink like a mix between B.O., shit, blood, urine, and tears. Oddly enough, it smells like oxidized Iron.

My father owns a junk scrapping business. Since I was fourteen I've spent every summer away from school with an acetylene torch slicing metal relics of industry into reusable hunks for future industries to make future relics. We smell like those junkyards. Junkyard junkies. Every whiff I catch sends on a split-second slingshot rush back to my young and dumb days roasting under a 100° sun, baking over a 300° chunk of slag. I hate this. What the fuck is taking him so long?

"Wake, up sweety." The voice is far off, there's a light, a little pinprick of glow in the blackness. "C'mon babe, we gotta do this."

"I don't want to..... it hurts."

"Jude! Wake the fuck up!" This comes with a slap, and the pinprick of light has now engulfed me. "He's back! He's returned to us! Our savior is here!"

Part of me is really irritated at the rude awakening.
Part of me is really irritated at the way they talk about him, all gospel like.
Part of me is really irritated that she doesn't look at me the way she looks at him.

But, mostly, I'm grateful. Now I get to bump. Now I get that ever so sweet release from this fucking nightmare. One last fix, one more chance. One last drug filled roll of the dice, and then maybe, just maybe I'll be dead and this will all be over.

We fall to our knees in his presence. Them out of respect, me because I've always been a follower. Whatever, it's the same routine every time. He walks among us placing his hand on our heads, giving his blessing. He tells us about the outside world, how bad it has gotten, how much worse since we've been here. How we are doing the Lord's work.

I just want the junk.

Yes, I'll kiss your fingers.
Yes I'll eat with you.
Yes, I'll pray with you.

Just get to the fucking part where we do drugs!

Always a delay, endless delay. We've fed, talked and received the word of God from the Savior. We've prayed and asked for forgiveness for the things that we have done and are most certainly going to do. Now is the time for contemplation. This is the time we stare at the altar, our ring of syringes pointing to Heaven. We stare and contemplate our choices, the paths that led us to this point. We focus on the pain, the junk pain, the itching and we not only try to come to terms with it, but take pleasure in it. We must understand that this is real, the pain is all we have left of reality.

Finally, we line up to receive our dosage. In a rare moment of self sacrifice, I move to last in line. I put Mary in front of me and gently massage her shivering shoulders. She looks so bad right now, so completely beaten. A kind, walking skeleton in shit stained jeans. She needs this more than I do.

One by one we kneel at the altar, say our blessings, and receive our intravenous relief. Since I'm the last, I get to watch the others slump over smiling with tears in their eyes. I take comfort in the fact that I will join them soon. Kneeling I kiss the feet of our Lord, say my blessings and raise my arm. But something's not right. I look into his eyes as wraps the tourniquet around my arm. Something's not right. He seems sad...no not sad, guilty. He's filled with a guilty sorrow, like a boy who is about to dutifully shoot his rabid dog.

This is bad!
I don't want this!
Fuck!
He's going to kill me!

The syringe, what the fuck is in that thing? Why is it so yellow? I start to struggle away, pulling against his nails locked into my flesh.

I want to scream, but only vomit comes.
I want to ask why, but all I can do is choke.

"My dear sweet Jude, you must understand how much I love you in this moment." Total panic overrides me. He can't be fucking serious. "This is the way it has to be. God spoke to me last night. He made it all clear. I understand everything, and soon you will too. I have to send you on a different path." The needle slides into my vein, and I weep uncontrollably as he pushes the fluid through.

"No, Philippe! I've told you a thousand times they have to be put in a triangle or else the skins will bruise too fast." The boy shakes his head dismissively as he sets to rearranging the apples in the sand. He's wearing worn and torn khaki pants and shirt with hemp sandals on his feet. His skin is a dark reddish bronze, dark even for a Mexican, which he so obviously is.

“I had to make the gate Jerome. I know the rules to your stupid game, but some of us better things to do.” This boy is sitting in a high backed, throne type chair covered in crushed purple velvet. He is dressed in a fine little tuxedo, with wing tipped shoes, hair greased and slicked back and a thin, little Black Bart mustache drawn across his upper lip.

“Why do you never use your fruit for the gate? Why does it always have to be mine?”

“Because yours is the fruit of sin, for which only sinners may make passage.”

“You’re making that up! That is not written anywhere.” The well dressed sighs and shakes his head.

“Every time it is the same argument with you, stop it, we have a guest.” At this both boys turn to me, and for the first time I notice their eyes. They’re not eyes at all, but coins. Philippe, the fine dressed boy, has gold. Jerome has silver. The coins are recessed slightly in, and the sockets in which they rest clasp tightly, completely surrounding the disks, like sphincters. The boys smile at me. Horrible, large, jagged tooth smiles dripping with malice. I see these two visions of horror stand and walk toward me with snakelike grace. They are trying to intimidate me, unsettle me, scare me, but I feel nothing. “Do you know who you are?” Philippe asks, still grinning.

“No.” I step forward into the sandpit, the little monsters stop and step back once. I feel the sand around my feet move. All around, snakes of all shapes and sizes poke their heads through the sand, slither here and there around and over my feet. It’s like I’m held for a moment. I want to move, but I don’t think I’m allowed to.

“Do you know who we are?”

“No.” The serpents loosen their hold and make way for another step forward. The rules are becoming clearer, but I still don’t know the game. One of the larger snakes comes to the surface, a great bulge right behind its head, like it has just swallowed something that it hasn’t had time to digest. The snake moves in front of me and regurgitates its prey at my feet. A doll, porcelain, its hair matted and skull fractured from the inside of the snake. Slowly, the broken toy rolls over to face me and open its eyes.

“The chair silly. You have to make it to the chair, it’s base, it’s the only place that’s safe.” I reach down to pick up the doll, but the large snake hisses, snatches it, and drags it back down below the sand. The two monster children look at one another and grin even wider.

“What is love?”

“I don’t know.” Another step forward.

“What is hope?”

“Beats me.” Another step forward.

“Is there a God?”

“Go ask the Pope.” Another step forward. One more to go.

“Are you alive?”

“You tell me.” And I sit. For the first time, I take in my surroundings. The chair sits in an empty sandlot to the left of a row of small buildings, maybe houses, maybe stores. It’s hard to tell because everything looks so run down. A cracked asphalt road separates this row of buildings from another one. My father took me to Mexico once, when I was young. All the little towns we would visit looked similar to this one. They

all seemed so old, yet modern at the same time, Like Old West ghost towns with Pepsi logos and power lines.

Across this broken highway, I see a group of people leaning against a guardrail, staring over a cliff. There is a salty breeze and I can hear surf crashing against the rocks below the cliff. The two monster children move to stand directly in front of me, Philippe with his orange and Jerome with his apple.

“This is the town of El Medio,” Jerome says extending the apple to me. “You are here because you don’t know your left from your right.”

“This is our sandlot. We are the children of lost dolls,” Philippe says extending the orange to me. “You are here because you don’t know your head from your ass.”

“This is my apple,” Jerome pushes it to my nose. “It is the first fruit of the first mother. It is red. Take it if you wish.”

“This is my orange,” Philippe pushes the apple out of the way. “It is the symbol of the sun, the light that guides all. Nothing rhymes with orange. Take it if you wish.”

Without hesitation, I brush the orange aside and snatch the apple out of Jerome’s hand. It’s funny how in dreams you always know exactly what to do. At least I think this is a dream. Who knows? It feels like a dream, but I’ve been wrong about these things before. Satisfied with myself, I move to take a bite from the apple. But, Philippe snatches my wrist before I get the fruit to my mouth.

“No señor, the fruit is not for you.”

“Then who is it for?”

“You should go watch the surfers with the rest of the people.” Jerome points to the crowd across the street. Why not? I stand and make my way across the sandlot, this time without the benefit of angry snakes.

“You guys wanna come with me?” I say to the two boys who haven’t moved an inch.

“We are the Children of Lost Dolls. This is our sandlot. Why would a god want to climb into an anthill?”

“Suit yourselves.” I say over my shoulder as I make my way to the crowd. When I get to the guardrail, some of the people notice me, give me greeting smiles and waves of hello, but no words are spoken.

Looking down the cliff I can see the waves crashing across the rocks below, giant red sand boulders stacked like gumballs. About a hundred yards out to sea, there are a group of surfers sitting on their boards in a circle waiting for their waves. I can’t quite tell but they seem to be moving their hands in distinct intricate motions, all in unison. It looks like a game of paper/rock/scissors, or something like that.

Finally one of the surfers leaves the group and paddles out a ways. The crowd tenses ever so slightly. He spots his wave and paddles into it, picking up speed, waiting for that perfect moment when it breaks. I suddenly feel this horrible dread creep up my spine. Something’s not right. I want to shout at him to stop, but I can’t make a sound.

The wave breaks and the surfer pops to his feet to ride it out. My head is alive with fear. I watch as the surfer skims over the surface of the water on his board, picking up speed, flying headlong into certain death. The world slows down for a brief moment dragging time by a collar. Then with a violent smack, the young man slaps against the rocks. My gut is twisting. Waves of dread and anxiety wash over me again and again.

I watch the receding waves bob his legs, working him off the rocks, pulling plumes of crimson into the blue of the water. My arms are gripped around the guardrail, my knees don't work, I'm crying so hard I can't breathe. Then the crowd points to the water and soon I can see what they're looking at. Gliding with smooth, fast, determination, a dark torpedo moves towards the dead surfer. I'm about to pass out. All guilt, all sadness, all pain, all sorrow, all fear blast at me like gusts of wind. The creature breaks the surface and clamps onto the leg of the body, dragging it below. Bubbles, chum, and blood, burst across the waves.

I'm a frightened child in the woods, a dead man walking, a woman in the throes of a rape. I am mindless horror. Even the crowd has changed. They stand erect with their eyes rolled into the back of their heads, licking at the air like convulsive dogs. They're actually enjoying this emotional bombardment.

It's too much to bear. I feel like I'm in a wind tunnel and nothing but misery is blowing at me. Then I see her. Just to my right, walking slowly and easily through the crowd. I guess, by what's considered sexy these days, she's not quite there, but man, does she glow. Her face is calm and loving. Naked from the waist up, her massive breasts hang perfect round and soft.

She stops and looks down at me with a gaze that only mothers give their babies, unconditional, all encompassing love. Her arms reach out to me and I shrink away, hiding my face in my shoulder. I'm tainted, dripping with sorrow and guilt. I would only contaminate her. But, she is determined. She grabs my arm and pulls me to my feet. I try to pull away, but not very hard. With her simple touch, I can feel the dread burning away from my skin. Before I can protest, she completely embraces me, pushing my head into her breasts with her hand. I weep. I weep so uncontrollably. I feel all the shame, the guilt, the hurt, the bad that I've been carrying my whole life wash away from me. I've never known a peace like this. No church, no love, no drug could ever come close to delivering this feeling. Slowly she rocks me side to side humming a melody I've never heard, but will never forget.

"I have a message for you." I'm barely listening. I feel so drained that I'm slobbering on her nipple. "I need you to listen little Judas." She motions for me to look up at her but I don't want to move. Regardless, she is persistent and I look up into her eyes.

"What?"

"You have a gift in your hand." I bring my hand up and look at the apple clutched in my fingers. "You must give this to the false Devil, the White Beast. All clocks are strange at first when they have no numbers, but with time and observation, the face will be known."

"I don't understand."

"I know, but that doesn't matter. All prophecy comes at the cost of a riddle." Gently, she moves her hand to my chest, just over my heart.

"I'm scared."

"I know, but you needn't be. You're just the messenger." Without warning, resistance or even pain, her hand plunges into my chest and wraps around my beating heart. "Time to face the music." Her fingers squeeze violently on my heart and the world flashes white.

“Dispatch this is 32, over.”

“Go ahead 32.”

“I’m on the scene here at the old Masterplex Theatre on Hartford. I’m going to need full emergency backup on this. Looks like 12 maybe 13 adolescents down, possible ODs. There’s paraphernalia everywhere, needles and syringes.”

“Copy that, EMS vehicles are en route to you.”

“Dispatch this is weird, looks like some kinda cult. It looks like The Last Supper”

“Say again 32.”

“They’re arranged at a table, looks like the last supper. Wait, there’s one on the other side of the room. He’s alive! Has something in his hand, possible explosive device.”

“Copy that, 32 you are advised to clear out and wait for backup, SWAT is en route.”

“Scratch my last Dispatch, it’s an apple.”

“Say again, 32.”

“It’s just a damn apple, kid’s clinging to it for dear life, but no threat.”

“Copy that, 32 you are cleared to give First Aid, until EMS vehicles arrive.”

“Copy that, 32 out.”