

# Ballad of the Barrens

Harrison Potts

Some men wear a face of apathy  
As they mill about the land.  
Their eyes stay fixated on the ground  
Or on the phone in their hand.

The real world remains unobserved  
And in effect unaltered.  
The days are short and the nights are long;  
The sun seems to have faltered.

I saw a group of young men walk by;  
They laughed at me as I passed.  
I don't know what it was all about,  
But I felt like an outcast.

Some men wear a fake and phony smile  
As they mill about the land.  
They act happy, polite, and friendly,  
But they're sinking in quicksand.

Everything in this place has perished  
Except the vultures and snakes.  
The dirt beneath us has turned to sand  
While we mill about like apes.

Houses and daycares are abandoned,  
They are now dust and ashes.  
"Who will save us? Who will save us now??"  
The people scream in masses.

Some men seem now to have found shelter  
In a haze of fantasy;  
Lost in the folds of fleeting pleasure,  
Distant from reality.

I stare out into this stark landscape  
Every day without blinking  
While people pretend to ignore it  
And keep fucking and drinking.

*In the room the women talk and snipe  
Of margaritas and Tinder swipes.*

The only shelter that they have now  
Comes from drinks and dopamine.  
“Endless swipes! Endless pleasure for all!”  
Screams the distraction machine.

Some men, as they mill about the land,  
Wear a look of apathy.  
They’ve been numbed by their indulgences  
And stripped of humanity.

Some men, as they mill about the land,  
Grin wide with a phony smile.  
They feel large and oh-so-important  
As they update their profile.

The Earth’s fertile soil that once grew life  
Has now become barren sand.  
The world’s full of voluntary slaves,  
Servants to pleasure’s command.

Some men wear a cross around their neck  
And think it grants protection.  
But it’s just another clever ploy,  
Another misdirection.

Temples fill to the brim with people  
Wanting gravely to be saved.  
Hoping salvation will be granted  
If silent and well-behaved.

Neither faith nor pleasure can spare men  
From death by dehydration.  
Our mouths are dry, our lips crack open,  
Awaiting our extinction.

Without water, men will go insane  
And scream, plead, and beg for salt.  
Their corpses lay out in the open  
Like roadkill on the asphalt.

*The desperate laying on of hands  
Cannot bring water to the badlands.*

A dreadful fool cries in the distance,  
“I am happy! I know joy!”  
But his face still shows a pained grimace  
As though he’s a spanked schoolboy.

He keeps screaming, tears run down his face  
As people walk right on by.  
They are naive, they believe his words,  
But can’t look him in the eye.

Beneath his mask of tears, snot, and screams  
There’s something deeply hidden.  
The face far under his well-worn mask  
Is plain, hurt, and grief-stricken.

The fool does not believe his own words,  
But his face is, too, a lie.  
There’s no true emotion left at all,  
He’s simply waiting to die.

Some men are eager to trade their pain  
For something to make them numb.  
“Eat, sleep, work, drink, fuck, binge, binge, repeat”  
Routines are a common one.

Love will perish with our grandparents  
And will turn into a myth;  
A story spoken around campfires  
And put children to bed with.

One cannot feel love without water  
And we’ve got nothing but dust.  
Love is not pleasure, nor is it mute,  
So it’s been replaced with lust.

Love here is like constructing a well  
At the peak of a sand dune  
And hoping that it will gush with life  
While believing “someday soon”.

*In the room people talk about love,  
Not really knowing what they speak of.*