



PETER
BRANSON

RED
SHIFT

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Red Shift

'Neither a borrower nor a lender be.' (*Hamlet*)

Before this latest mess they pestered us
to use their cards, take out cute kit-your-home
out loans. Phone call, spam mail or snail, TV,
imprint; end of the day, we fall. Roll up,
ring out same tired theme tune: "It trickles down,
prosperity, so all do well, d'you see."
Don't say when they've recouped their share, be bare
bones left for you; blind rambling downturn blues.

They bind us to them heart and soul, refine
with clever marketing how we consume.
The bubble burst, black hole, the butterfly
effect, dark stuff; weird quantum alchemy,
base lead from gold. Though Jack's all right, Next-door's
redundant, fifty-two, requires CV,
asks you. No gay Antonio to bail
him out, needs money — 'Mortgage, bills to pay.'

Recession don't change much 'less you're in debt
or on the dole. Destabilized, may be
too late; the toy balloon, inflated, grasped
by finger tips, released. No siren's raised;
no fire engine, police car or ambulance,
that drop in pitch to signify you've flipped,
blue chip to sheer insolvency, worn out
your credit-rating stations-of-the-shop.

They'll goose you while you're healthy, salmon-pink,
try not to drain you dry; mostly you cope:
'Consolidate your debts into one place.'
Then it's red shift. Micawber's "Something will
turn up" won't do. You're irredeemable,
can't turn the tide. They take the reins: "The deal
was all explained to you before you signed.
See there, small print, the bottom of the page."

They charge-you-till-you-bleed and when you do,
they seize what they already own: buy now —
pay later stuff, your car, your home. You're in
a mental Marshalsea. They're in control.
"I'm being reasonable. Don't take that tone
with me. It's here in black and white. What's that?
You didn't realise? Why? Can't you read?
Those tears won't wash. There's nothing I can do."

Chipping Camden, July

1.

There are no chip shops in Chipping Camden:
camp coaching inns serve a la carte French fries;
smooth types talk up antiques. Seduced by scones
in tired tea rooms, watch fate glide out of reach.
This scene within a scene: palms greased by wool,
hard-headed burgers thrived. World in retreat,
amble down Stepford Street in perfect light,
smiling at nothing in particular
with Germans, Spaniards, Yanks and Japanese.
Roofs sag like well-fed sails; walls lounge and sprawl.
Sunbeams cure cold oatcake to honeycomb,
gold held in aspic by a valium sky,
myth rare as purest myrrh or frankincense
to tempt travellers with Midas cards to buy.

2.

First starburst singled out the church, revised
half-buried history of the old hall.
On pilgrimage to Dovers Hill, you watched
a tower of doubt develop in the sky.
Grim times: the burgers twitched and crossed themselves;
they took the long-term view. The Badgers Hall
Tea Rooms got taken out (twelve dead). Alarmed,
you hurried round, passed bodies in the street,
found zombies damned with faith and flying grief.
Some wailed like beasts beneath a crescent moon,
others clawed frantically to move the hard-
faced stone. Last wave brought down The Volunteer
where all the regulars had drifted back
ten minutes after hope rang the all clear.

Errwood

(The ruin of Errwood Hall, Goyt Valley, Derbys)

Climb Shooters Clough above the reservoir.
Giant rhododendron, chestnut, oak and pine
conceal vast cultivated terraces,
deep feral green beside the Silver Brook.
Find ravaged Errwood Hall, walking with ghosts:
Italianate conceit procured to make
a second-generation high church gent
of merchant and mill owner, Sam Grimshaw.

Design abandoned with so much estate
below high water line: d'you see, revenge,
justice, sweet poetry; enlightenment,
wizened by time, robbed out to feed the dam;
a dynasty built on live sacrifice,
breathtaking smoke, starved back to back; God's plan.

The National Health

For Charlie Bufton

They'd stanch'd the stones; some veined between pale flags
in a St George motif. Icon etched deep:
just montage things, sink like an abattoir;
still snags against the grain of licensed sleep.

She'd shuffled to the doctor's house, past graves
who strafed your coveyed wagons near her door.
White as the washing line, halo of blood,
lay cold and aimless on the kitchen floor.

They'd tell him when he'd finished lunch. He came,
pronounced it 'A damned shame!' Loop talk was rife:
widow, two kids; words loitered, slanced with bite;
if private they'd have dowsed him back to life.