

september 5, 1984

**fred tipped the bench in white intensity –
an almost farmer labourer of time –
faded jeans – plaid shirt and eaten hands –
face written long in weather rivulets –
blue eyes lasered in and out of voice –**

***what i say is i say wait and see
see what they do –***

**he struck another match
to flame his pipe
puffing twice in smoke
that smouldered out –**

***i'll tell you why
i don't trust tory power - not that i like
religion in forever arguments
but i remember fifty years ago
when they were in – there wasn't any work
and all the politicians said "no money
to make jobs" – until the war broke out -
then suddenly they found enough for guns
and propaganda – but that was then -
maybe now they've changed – let's wait and see –
just wait and see – but i remember that
when i was young
i couldn't understand why everyday
we ate stale bread and old potatoes –***

***i found work at odd-time summer jobs
near harvesting – they never paid
enough – and my mother couldn't work -
she was widowed and most often sick –
she had to beg –***



**fred's eyebrows dove white wings
into his eyes – he knocked the pipe against
his knee and knifed each word in low –**

***no money – we stole our winter firewood
and still we almost froze –
the winters were the worst – no work anywhere –
all the government could say was “sorry
there's no money” – do you know how much
my mother got – how much she got
to feed herself and me and pay the rent
and every other thing? you know how much?
two bucks and fifty cents – and that was s'posed to
last
two weeks – but we were luckier than some –
there were dozens – hundreds of immigrants
with nothing – begging food from doorways –
and if you gave a crust they'd kiss your hand
and cry because it meant that maybe
they could live another day –***

***but that was then – perhaps its different now -
conservatives have always meant hard times -
maybe that's all changed – but fifty years ago
it was hell – god i'm feeling sick -
i felt good yesterday - real good
and voted liberal - but then elections
said conservatives were in – and with
a landslide victory - then i remembered back –
back then – all those depression years –
the luckiest were those who lived on farms –
at least they had some garden space for food
and even when the sun burnt out their crops
they salvaged more than city folk – and sometimes
they shot a rabbit just to break the craziness
that goes with starving – It was everywhere –***



*i remember that we had no curtains –
everything went into clothes –
one set to wear - another for the wash –
that is - for those who could afford two sets –
many never could - and without homes
they'd crowd the city streets and beg and cry –
no one really knows how many died –*

*i was always mad – mad at my mother
when we had no meat – no fish – no eggs -
only breads and porridges for mush
three times a day – all meals were the same –
and then the war – when suddenly it seemed
the government found lots and lots of money
to buy uniforms and ammunition –
i still don't understand it – then it was
conservatives and they were strong – and now
they're in again – and still talking guns
and uniforms –*

*fred struck another match into his pipe
ran blunt fingers through
loose wisps of hair and
shrank into the bench –*

*i don't like talking politics – let's wait –
let's wait and see –*

*he faded grey
shifting voice and eyes into half thought –*

*maybe – maybe they've changed –
let's wait and see.*

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