

PETER BRANSON

## The Salvager

He spent his hard-earned freedom in this shed,  
two bar electric fire, appraising form  
and filling betting slips, old woodwork tools  
and garden implements fussed over, rubbed  
to sheen with oily rag, at our expense.  
No doubt he was at home here making stuff,  
his fag end glowing on/off, like Morse code.  
The smell's what kicks you when you first come in,  
that mix of sawdust, polish, oil and damp.  
His workbench fills one end and there are shelves  
on all four walls, with jam-jars full of strange  
concoctions, tins of every shape and hue,  
unlabelled so you've no idea what lies  
within, yet he knew perfectly each one:  
drill bits, nuts, bolts, nails, screws, rawl plugs and such,  
then underneath, in ordered piles, used wood.  
For nothing went to waste; spent happy hours  
recycling stuff. He'd tease out nails from planks,  
tap-hammer them till straight - against his vice.  
He fashioned things with craft and care, each joint  
perfection, never mind how long it took,  
his coat slung on a nail inside the door,  
the pockets tired and sagging out of true.  
"Man of few words," Macmillan nurse explains  
when you turn up just after he has gone.  
Later, you howl, pummel the steering wheel.  
Hot tears, bleak school reports, cold war missiles,  
dark Hindley clones lurk deep inside your dreams.  
He sneaks in here when trouble brews: "I'm down  
this week," he sighs, short-changing her again.