

Task for *It's Raining in Mango*

Extract from the prologue to *It's Raining in Mango*

Even at the end of things she is still looking for a reason as she had been at the beginning, puzzling in a muddleheaded way while she watches that fool of a Reeve, legs dangling from fifty feet up where he has lashed himself for the third day into the crown of a celerywood tree.

Along the new road being hacked through the rain forest, bulldozers grumble and snort and shove brutally at the matted green, blades skimming challengingly towards the heads of protesters buried up to the neck or nudging back a still chanting mob of greenies. She shifts the binoculars upwards and catches sight of Reeve's straining face as he peers back down the track through leaves. There's a gummy smile on his mouth, the set look of martyrdom frozen into a kind of dubious bliss. His greying hair is blowing in jagged slices all over his lined and kindly mug and his hoicked-up skirt and the vulnerability of his middle-aged shanks make Connie want to weep.

She puts down the binoculars and gets her yard hat, cramming it over her own ashen plaits before blundering out and down the house track to the road.

Someone has to stop him.

Defiance has its natural sticking-point and it is apparent that that hot nest of leaves in the upper limbs of the celerywood is it.

Tough, sun-cured, she lets her anxiety and distress tumble her along that half mile of mud-rut from the house, reeling through downhill years of comers and goers, aware of herself as stayer, the last of the real stayers, she decides, falsely but proudly, as she trots, stiff-necked, to squawk sense into someone.

For the first time in more than sixty years her solitariness daunts her.

Sweet reason, she keeps telling herself against all reason, against the ticking of summer grass, against tree hiss, against the whooped amusement of hidden waters. But the lewdly mouldering heat paws at her.