

PRIOR



Maurice Scully

Sell everything then hope for the best: these
are the basic instructions. The way the root wraps
the rock to the moist crevice sending the bole up,
up to the light and leaf to the sky and sunlight.
Each lesson shimmers on and qualifies the next. So
there.

I look at the thread. I watch, I hope, doing the sweatshop
rag (pick up the whisper-movement in the grass,
the insane harmonies of money) and in my hand
mistake everything for everything else: floodlit factories,
fences, dogs, men, uniforms. Maybe I. But. A lax moment
in the zoo. Ready or not, begin.

When the pieces fit moving in the weave they make a noise together, snug in Disaster Depicted, not Disaster. Apply the poison. Proboscis, ovipositor, plain

stab-of-the-beak. Under the Tulip Tree, the Jacaranda. Note.

Little human things I remember or can't forget: I seem to be holding a white pen in my right hand, thinking How can I trap light with this thing? He said it was called an "idiot stick", in the army, referring to something else. Quite right too.

Through and through: a knot, note, is a difficult concept; witness any child attempting, folding and winding.

The page nine. Moving in the weave. The number 52, moving in the weave. Under the Tulip Tree, the Jacaranda; little human things, like trying to remember, a noise, a melody in the mind. Suddenly I can remember everything (it seemed) (a brilliant blur): another mistake. Three noises. Five vivid things.

The name of the noise of what they were saying doesn't contain this or the web of the meaning of what they were saying and this together, shimmering, terrific, in the grass somewhere. Stay in your building until the dustdrift clears. Then begin.

A mess of reminiscence is nothing. *Fadó, fadó ríamb.*
I was living on a small half-empty island, cold and wet,
full of conservative artists repeating by rote the
one native repertoire in a trance of blind confidence,
deeply gouged lies—the surface of Jupiter’s Ganymede
as I remember it—in the same breath, phrase-packets,
a very I must say very slow poetry: this was not Africa.
Procumbent. I left. A weave is something.

I was looking at the picture of the traces of colliding
high energy particles from the bubble chamber. Put your
hand in mine (I almost wrote), feel the weave.

A Candelabra Tree has no leaves. Never. A most unusual-
looking tree the book says. It is: my eyes, look. A Tulip
Tree is alright, but the Baobab—now there’s a thing!

To get known, affectionately, in esteem, by one’s initials,
not carved; printed, repeated, distributed, displayed, discussed,
indeed flourished at the end of a work.

To have no readers is hard. None at all. The advantages of
isolation and silence creak in the scales in the old store where
nothing’s for sale anyway: *Keep Out* (pale profile in skeletal
light through slats).

Three year-old Louis, my son, is playing in a sandpit
making me “dinn-ah”. I’m extending the Menu each time
he returns, breathless, with offerings, to get some time,
writing on the edge, as I often have to do. He’s extending his
word-field, watching, absorbing, making “mistakes” as we all
do. (Are we happy about that?) *Tús maith.*

Enormous woodpiles on the women's heads.
The silent erect cactus, the no-whisper
in the trees' leaves. I had a history.

The lemon tree, the grapefruit, the lime:
watching the complications, trying to find,
to tug at a masterstrand in the web. Now—
hey—that's ambitious. Acknowledge the arrowhead
in the dustcloud as the van to Odzi, the future,
invisible—but the map? What's that in a swamp
of metaphor. Moving in the weave. And beat
each other senseless with Love.

They got to know each other, doe eyes to doe eyes, touched
in the shadow and sunlight and the sweet stimulus
and—what exactly crushes their permanent, delicate
bridges to splinters? (pulp?) They beat each other
senseless with lovemaking in the weave, is the repeating
pattern given time. A mild curative breeze begins. Begin.

Into the shadowy shop again this morning—
take a seat—flat hard inhospitable things,
I know, but bear with me, we don't have many
customers and we don't encourage them, as you know
(half warning, half compliment): *Welcome*.
On the scales here then we have the Names of
the Ingredients against their Idea, which I'd like
to weigh this morning against the alienness
of these to the human mind—are you with me?

Not mad and mannered, taking care what you write,
maybe you've been in too many places and need peace,
stasis, already, but is there any utterance that
curves, pliant (I've long ago lost my taste for
bottled poetry) not filled with air-bubbles?

Behind the baroque swimming shimmer of slices of what
there is I think I know what the flat maps spell.
Reality, war-soaked, boiling in the heat-haze?
(& this gives you that headache again?) Tentatively
watch, controlling the nightmares, the self-erected
traps, thorned, horned, ridiculous and deft.

Begin: an inventory of engaging rubbish is the gleaming
ambiguous horde under the floorboards of that book
in the dream in the dark: smell of old wood split open—
a muffled, sad crack—and dry-rot. The rhythmic
stridulations of all the different little beings build up
in the air an orchestral alien-ness: human-man-man
it says I hear I say it says, realizing, in a place called
for the map makers, Odzi. In the shadowshop the scales,
my bright and brittle scales, creak: what is the mindprice
of what.

How can I not care for what you believe, care—
grainbins, cave paintings—but please not the pictures
of pictures of pictures, acquired against caring.
Less than a fruitbat's fart in the dark, measured
(with wry, exaggerated care) on the delicate scales in psi.

We came upon it through the hilly thicket, snake-place,
spiritplace, huge overhangs, boulders placed on edge
by a God at play in the dreamtime, the swollen roots of
trees out of pure rock—a wonder against nature—here,
hidden, 2 grainbins, paintings, the single claw of a
black hawk. Quietly our children. Begin descending.

This is my desk. This is where I work.
I'm scraping candle grease off it and
brushing away all the dust that blows in
through cracks during dry spells in the rainy season.
I work hard in my corner, any chance I get,
really I do.

There's an insufferable smell of shit in this small
box which is called, with no sense of irony, my "study".
The wind bringing in again what we leave out again.

And I've been busy. Busy eating, drinking, giving ear,
listening to repetitive nonsense, setting out, getting
a living, watching my children, teaching my children,
making Lesson Plans, filling paper. But do I ever
learn anything? And if I ever do, do I remember it?
Breath, breathe, breath, breathe...

*(This is the opening section of the book Priority, which is Book III of
Livelihood, a work in five books.)*