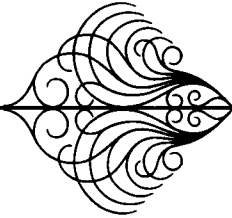


The Prawn

*Today I saw upon the stair
Of London Transport lying there
a prawn : woeful look upon his face
looking very out of place
half way up and half way down
the deepest spiral stairs in town.
As I looked a funny thought came over me
Of me of him aswimming in the sea,
dillying at this and that
in his natural habitat,
and how he never dreamed to be
found in such preposterity.
And how we, none of us, can know
Where the hell we're gonna go.*

Pauline Saiz



M. SARCANS

THE CHANGELING

The psycho-surgical operation was a very brief affair. I awoke to find myself lying on an operating table. I could not move my arms, my legs, nor my head. It was rigidly clamped in a stereotaxic frame.

‘Just a few adjustments, Mr. Nimitz. Close your eyes, open your eyes. Once more. Yes, now open. Good’.

Something snapped.

‘Close your eyes Mr. Nimitz. Good. Yes, that’s very good. You can go to sleep now, Mr. Nimitz’.

I awoke in a general ward. My head in bandages. I noted the ease with which I made conversation with my ward-mates, and an unfamiliar, ready laughter. I smiled often and received smiles in return. I was changed.

It was three months more before I

gained my release. In that time I practised my new found art of making people smile. I made the ward sister smile. Even the prison governor smiled! I could make people laugh too, but this took words and much practice.

On my release, I earned a living by entertaining in a local cafe-bar. This was a great success. Soon I had people who could give me good words to say. I had offers from the clubs - good offers too - but moved straight into television under the name of Stefan Poludurak. No one in the studios knew my history, and none knew of the change.

I knew.

Somewhere there was a remnant of my former self, the quiet one, the thoughtful one, the political philosopher who sat by his typewriter day after day typing his thoughts, then painstakingly preparing the stencils for the duplicator. Those long, quiet hours of slow typing, the thump-thump of the duplicator, the rustle and collation of papers, the crunch of the stapling machine : those days were gone.

I knew.

I stood smiling before a mirror and rehearsed my lines. They would laugh.

The thought came. Suppose the change were wrong? - how can I tell? *I* am still *I* it seems, but this is an illusion of the change. I cannot

tell *what* is missing; but suppose it were something better than I have now? This is ridiculous! I have everything! Wealth, the adoration of the public.

One day, I was given a political tract. I read it with interest. There was so much there that could have been my own thoughts. I smiled, 'This is the work of a political genius!'

'You are that man', said the donor.

He went out of my hotel suite and I never saw him again.

Suppose that I really were that man, I mean *am* that man, but am not, because of the change. This is ridiculous! I smiled. *He* was a peaceful man. *He* would not wish his death to be avenged by blood. Yes, he was dead, even though I spoke with his tongue and saw his eyes. That was a great man. But I, his changeling image, could revenge his departure, for I was not bound by the code that bound him. I know what it is that I do not know - do you understand me? - and what I did know was forever lost when *that something* snapped. The whole man had understood cruelty, and I, a part of that whole, understood it too, and used my understanding to make people laugh.

I made the necessary preparations.

And so it came to pass that at the Command Performance I lobbed three grenades into the Presidential Box.