

Carpathian Days

I might have known: *You want to go on a Monday?*
Me, I'd go on another day. The usual superstition. Or lack of
 organisation.

I could have gone on another day, but Monday I'm at the stadium,
 watching the wonderful world go by. A man with no legs
 by a booth, a woman beneath an umbrella. (This the view from
 the stall.)

Then, all of a sudden, here comes the bus.

There's nothing worse than a broken-down bus.
 If it doesn't conk out, we'll be there after dark, on Tuesday.
 So fingers crossed that the engine not stall.
 National Express: the last word in organisation!
 On the train at least you can stretch your legs.
 Nobody knows if we stop in Garwolin.

We didn't. But we've fifteen minutes in Ryki.
 My neighbour gets out for a fag, then walks around the bus.
 Across the aisle a girl sips a Coke, legs
 in the air, ugly as sin. She's not going back till Wednesday
 when her man goes into the army. Which calls for the organisation
 of vodka, some chairs and a stool.

A driver needs to have nerves of steel.
 One false move and instead of the station in Lublin
 we stop for good at the mortuary. *What kind of an organisation*
—this, next day, in the papers—lets a hysteric drive its bus?
 We'll be an item till Thursday,
 at least. On the evening news: my corpse, its legs.

Alive, we drive on. The girl sits so I can see her legs
then covers them—damn!—along with the scars where the little steel
pins (or needles) went in. Her neighbour suggests they go out
some night, Friday
he picks up his wage. They could spend the weekend in
Krasnystaw,
two whole days! Immediately everyone sat on the bus
gives a cheer. We're all one happy family, one well-oiled organisation.

It's getting late.—*The driver is taking some corners! —Every organisation
chokes in the end on itself, kicks the proverbial bucket. Both legs.
Same with memory. Just you wait.* Years on, the bus
sways beneath a great magnet, today shards of memory, shards
of steel.

Till when I'm sat at the station in Zamość.
Till then! (Then being this coming Saturday.)

If I show up. To think of the organisation involved in exchanging
addresses!
Some Monday, no doubt, I'll throw this piece of paper away.
Legless, no doubt, in Tomaszów.
Leant against the bus, with a damp cigarette, I'll watch the wind
seize it—and lose it in style.

(Translated from the Polish by Cathal McCabe)

Love

No glosses. References.
Footnotes. Entries.
A libation of silent vines.

Everything depends
on how long we stay forever.

Password

We keep hours in the bank.
Our town hall clock strikes
at someone else's expense.

We. Away from the cold turmoil of day.
The uniformed philosophies.
The advancing tourist squadron
collecting autographs from landscapes.
Avoiding deformed squirrels.

We. The unique. We lie on slopes of clouds
reciting our password.

Let's Not Plan a Journey

Let's not plan a journey.
Antique tragedy in the river veins.
White strawberries on the table.

That incident during supper
stemmed from a loss of hearing and desire.
We watch the sunset
suspiciously.
The vista lacks ambition.

Today our guests are attracted
by the obsessive whiteness of the table cloth.
Dessert ovations.

Conversations turn emotional beige.
We can't handle the terror
of the zip.
We're confused by
the awkward syntax of buttons.

And to top it all the politics the politics
the incurable climate in
Intensive Care.

The Daltonists

We can't remember
when we went colour blind.

Blue eyes
enslaved by greyness.

Childhood a brown fortress.
A meadow a colourless phrase.

Ignorant in the museum
we praise Chagall's *Dream* in vain.

Red and aquamarine betrayed us.
Pink marble broke its word.

At the haberdasher's we buy
funeral trimmings, ribbons, tapes, thread.

The turn of the century is swathed in fog.
We wipe our myopic specs.

Our lovers mow the grass
and complain of a dry summer.

*(Translated from the Polish
by Barbara Bogoczek and Tony Howard)*