

Life While-You-Wait

by Wisława Szymborska
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Life While-You-Wait.
Performance without rehearsal.
Body without alterations.
Head without premeditation.

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I know nothing of the role I play.
I only know it's mine. I can't exchange it.

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I have to guess on the spot
just what this play's all about.

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Ill-prepared for the privilege of living,
I can barely keep up with the pace that the action demands.
I improvise, although I loathe improvisation.
I trip at every step over my own ignorance.
I can't conceal my hayseed manners.
My instincts are for happy histrionics.
Stage fright makes excuses for me, which humiliate me more.
Extenuating circumstances strike me as cruel.

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Words and impulses you can't take back,
stars you'll never get counted,
your character like a raincoat you button on the run –
the pitiful results of all this unexpectedness.

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If only I could just rehearse one Wednesday in advance,
or repeat a single Thursday that has passed!
But here comes Friday with a script I haven't seen.
Is it fair, I ask

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(my voice a little hoarse,
since I couldn't even clear my throat offstage).

You'd be wrong to think that it's just a slapdash quiz
taken in makeshift accommodations. Oh no.

I'm standing on the set and I see how strong it is.

The props are surprisingly precise.

The machine rotating the stage has been around even longer.

The farthest galaxies have been turned on.

5 Oh no, there's no question, this must be the premiere.

And whatever I do

will become forever what I've done.