

*These
Numbered
Days*

SAMPLER

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Peter Huchel

These Numbered Days

SAMPLER
Gezählte Tage
(1972)

*translated from German
by Martyn Crucefix*

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2019 by
Shearsman Books
50 Westons Hill Drive
Emersons Green
BRISTOL
BS16 7DF

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office
30–31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB
(this address not for correspondence)

www.shearsman.com

ISBN 978-1-84861-660-8

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

*I would like to thank Marion Adler for her invaluable help in the early stages
of this translation. Thanks also to Hub Knijssen, Radboud University,
Netherlands, for his advice and assistance in the latter stages.
Of course, any errors that remain are all my own.*

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Introduction

KAREN LEEDER

(To come)

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SAMUEL

Ophelia

Later, come morning,
against the white of sunrise,
wading boots
through shallow waters,
the probing of sticks,
a curt command,
they lift out a muddied
snare of barbed wire.

No kingdom,
Ophelia,
where one cry
hollows the water,
one spell
and the bullet
splinters on a willow leaf.

Answer

Between two nights
comes brief day.
The farmyard remains.
And for us, a trap set
in the brake by the hunter.

Midday's desolation.
It still warms the stone.
A chirp in the wind,
the burring of a guitar
down the hillside.

Fuse-wires
of withered leaves
glint on the wall.

Salt-white air.
Arrowheads of autumn,
the flight of cranes.

In bright boughs
the hour's pulse subsides.
Spiders deploy
their rims and spokes,
the veils of dead brides.

Under the Constellation of Hercules

A settlement,
no larger
than the circle
a buzzard traces
in the evening sky.

A stone wall,
rough-cut, scorched
with rusted moss.
A bell note,
across the glittering water
smoke carries
from the olives.
Fire,
fed by stems
and wet leaves,
cut through with voices,
none of which you know.

Bent already by the night
into his icy harness,
Hercules drags
the stars' chain-harrow
up the northern sky.

Arrival

Men in white
ripped sashes
ride the rim of the sky
towards the barns
in search of lodging,
one night only,
where the Sibyls
live in the scythes' dust.

Green-footed
the moorhen hangs
from a stake.
Who'll pluck it?
Who kindles a bonfire
under the smoking fog?
Woe to the lost
crown of Ephraim,
to the withered flower
in the blades of the mower,
to night
on the cold threshing floor.

A hoof still
beats the hour.
And by morning
the sky-wide shriek of crows.