

David Ray

A DAY AT A TIME

for Victor Klemperer

"Anyone who does not lose his reason over certain things has no reason."

—Gotthold Lessing

Just walking down the street
you have to heil Hitler many times.
You go shopping for meat
but the sign is in the window
and the butcher waves you away.

Don Carlos is banned because
on stage he said something
favoring the theme of freedom,
and an actor is shot for telling
a joke about Hitler. Another tax

is levied, but only against Jews,
another oath of loyalty required,
this time *eternal*, requiring a triple
Sieg Heil. *A Farewell to Arms*
is banned, too pacifist, soon all

books by non-Aryans are pulled
from the shelves. You find that
you're banned from the reading
room. They take back your card.
At home you read quickly, knowing

that soon your books will be burned.
Two policemen drop by to pick up
your ration card—no more cigarettes
or chocolate or gas for the jalopy
you love. At the American Embassy

you are told that your number is
56,429 and your wife's is 56,430.
But it is not likely any visas will be
approved although back in America
the policies are being reviewed.

Patience is advised. The two policemen
return to search the house for weapons.
You tell them you have an old saber
from when you served the fatherland
in the Great War, but you don't know

where it is, that saber. They insist
on helping you find it—the task
takes a few hours, everything
turned upside down, inside out.
Basement and attic are ransacked.

At last the saber turns up in a trunk.
You go along to the station to be
charged for the crime, harboring
a weapon. Soon they come back
to collect your typewriter. It must be

tiresome for the policemen, you say
to your wife, to come back so often,
one time for this, the next for that—
the family silver, the radio—and to make
the Inventory of Assets, possessions

they will steal as soon as they kill you.
There is always something overlooked,
or which some bureaucrat has now
thought of. Your professorship, of course,
was the first thing to go, your pension

cut down almost to nothing. You keep
hoping a job will turn up in Japan or India

or South America. A friend writes how
it's green there—you know what she means.
You ask yourself if you're going to hang on

until it is too late—for months friends
have been saying goodbye—they got out.
You ask yourself this every day, long after
it's too late. The language they use is not
the German you learned as a child.

When the Führer says he will *swear in blood*,
he means murder. You can't take your mother
to the hospital lest she be euthanized.
You are told your house must be sold but
that you will be given seven and a half percent.

You notice how, as long as there is alcohol
and gasoline, drunk driving seems an attractive,
often fatal, diversion. You note that “veronal
in a hotel room” is sometimes the answer.
You see that many, e.g., yourself, are blacking out,

going blind for minutes, even hours, at a time.
You observe that there are potholes and mud craters
on all roads but the magnificent, much-glorified
Autobahn, shown off to foreigners. You perceive
that meadows and woods, lovely as ever, wait

it out for the hell to be over. You agree that once
the Olympics are finished it will be open season
on those without sabers, typewriters, jobs, radios,
silver, pensions, houses, cars, books, telephones,
synagogues, rifles, machine guns, tanks, cavalry,

bombers, fighter planes, grenades, trenchcoats,
motorcycles, swastika armbands, maps, garroting
ropes, poison pellets, firing squads, friends
from abroad, homelands (fatherlands, motherlands),
visas, passports, adequate disguises, escape routes.