



**Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets  
Christoph Rilke**

**The Chronicle of the Love and Death of the Flag-Bearer,  
Christoph Rilke**

**Music, Viktor Ullmann**

**Prose-Poem, Rainer Maria Rilke**

(Theresienstadt / Terezín, 1944)

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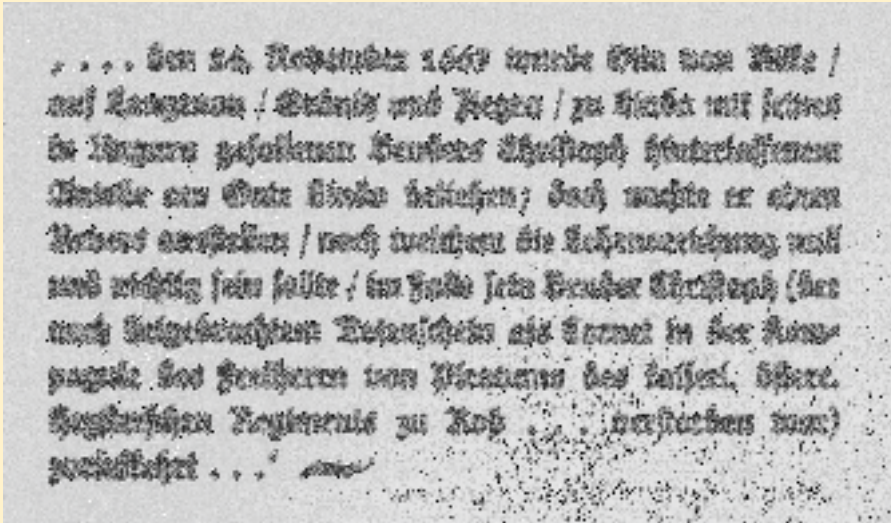
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## Part One

### I

“ . . . on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1663, Otto von Rilke / of Langenau / Gränitz and Ziegra / of Linda was placed in charge of the Linda estate left by his brother, Christoph, who had fallen in battle in Hungary. It was necessary, however, to undertake a process / that would make the feudal tenure of the estate null and void / in case his brother Christoph, who according to the death certificate had died as a Flag-Bearer in the Company of Baron Pirovano of the Imperial Austrian Heyster Cavalry, should return . . .”



. . . . Den 24. Novembri 1663 wurde Otto von Rilke / auf Langenau / Gränitz und Ziegra / zu Linda mit seinen in Ungern gelassenen Bruders Christoph Statthalterns Stelle am Orte Linda beauftraget; Doch machte er einen Protest anstellen / noch welchem die Lehensurkundung null und nichtig sein sollte / im Falle sein Bruder Christoph (der nach heiligsteuerrischen Bescheidens als Banner in der Kompagnie des Freiherrn von Pirovano des Kaiserl. Heere. hochwürdigem Regimente zu Kos . . . verstorben worden) zurückkehret . . .



## II

Ride, ride, riding,  
Through the day, through the night, through the day.  
Ride, ride, riding,  
And courage has become so very weary, and longing so great.  
There are no longer any mountains, barely a tree stands.  
Nothing dares to stand in the way.  
Unknown cabins crouch by springs grown over with swamps.  
Not even a tower anywhere.  
And always the same image.  
One has two eyes too many.  
Only at night does one sometimes believe the way is familiar.  
Perhaps at night, we can pass along that part of the road again that  
We've already taken?  
Just maybe.  
The sun is weighed down, as it is at home in the summer.  
But it was in summer that we said farewell.  
The dresses of the women shone so long against the summer foliage.  
But we've been riding for a long time.  
It must be autumn.  
At the very least there, where sad women are thinking about us.

### III

Someone tells us of his mother.  
Apparently, the storyteller is a German.  
Loudly but slowly, he chooses his words.  
Like a young woman gathering flowers in a bouquet,  
Reflecting on what she's doing without knowing  
how it will turn out.

Thus, he too chooses his words.  
For happiness? For suffering?

Everyone listens.

They even stop spitting.

For they're all gentlemen, who know how to behave  
themselves.

And suddenly, those in the company who do not  
understand German are able to do so, sensing  
the individual words:

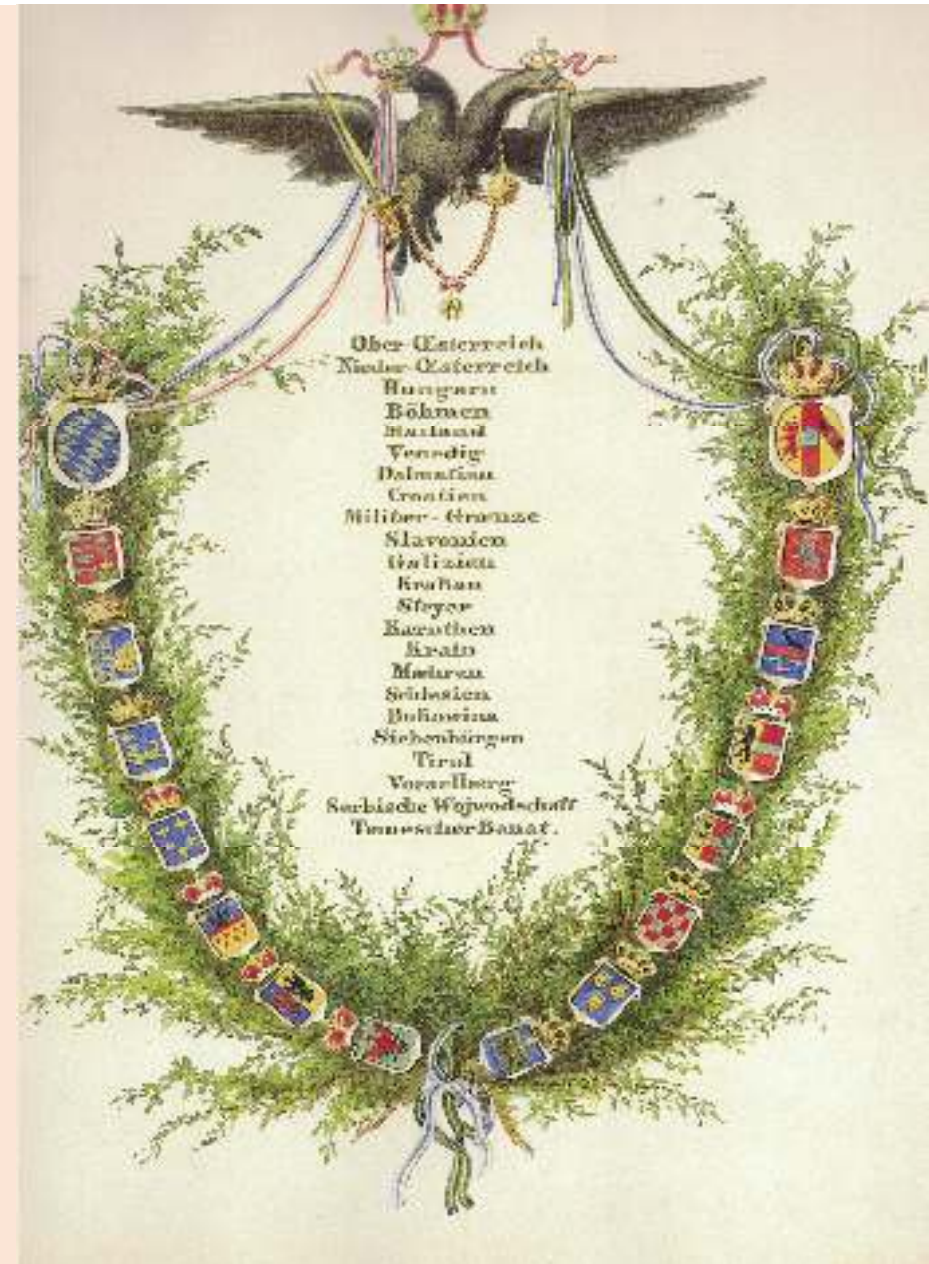
“In the evening . . . it was small . . .”

There, all these gentlemen are gathered close to each  
other,

Though they come from France, from Burgundy,  
from the Netherlands, from the valleys of  
Carinthia, from castles in Bohemia –  
And from Emperor Leopold.

For what any one of them tells, the others, too, have  
experienced it.

As if there were only *one* mother for all.



## V

The soldier from Langenau is writing a letter,  
Buried deep in thought.  
Slowly, he traces large, serious, clear letters on the page:  
“My dear mother, be proud, for I am the flag-bearer,  
Free yourself from worries: I carry the flag,  
Let yourself love me: I carry the flag . . .”  
Then he sticks the letter inside his uniform jacket,  
In the most secret of places. And he thinks to himself:  
Perhaps, someday, someone will find it. Someone . . .  
And he thinks to himself: For the enemy is near.  
They ride over the body of a slain peasant.  
His eyes were wide open, mirroring something in them:  
It’s not the sky.  
Later, dogs are howling. They come upon a village, at last.  
And above the houses a stone castle rises up.  
The massive bridge extends from it. The gate is enormous.  
They are greeted with a horn.  
Listen: roaring, clattering, and dogs barking!  
Horses neighing the courtyard, hooves beating and  
shouting.



## Part Two

### I

Rest! Just once to be only a guest.

For once, not to take care only of one's needs with what's at hand.

For once, not to seize things as an enemy;

For once, just to let things happen naturally and to know  
That what happens is good . . .

Not always to be a soldier.

To let one's hair be unkempt, and to loosen one's collar,

And to sit in a silk chair, feeling it gently with one's  
fingertips:

. . . As if one had just bathed.

And to learn again just what women are.

And to know those who are white, and those who are  
blue;

What their hands are like, and how they sing with their  
smiles.

And when the blond boys bring in bowls of fruit, heavy  
with juice.





## II

At first, it was just a meal.

And then it became a feast, no one knew just how.

The flames flared up, voices swirled, and crazy songs  
bounced off all the glass and the glitter.

And as the song's measures took shape,

A dance sprang forth.

They were all swept away.

Wave upon wave swelled in the halls,

They made each others' acquaintances,

They chose one other,

They took leave and then found each other again,

They bathed in the radiance and the blinding light.

They wafted in the summer breezes,

Which surrounded them as if the clothing of warm  
women.

From the dark wine and from a thousand roses

Runs the hour that rushes toward the dreams of the  
night.

### III

One of them, wearing white silk, realizes that he cannot awaken,

For he's already awake and confused by reality.

So he flees with fear into the dream and stands in the park,

Alone in the black park.

And the feast is now far away.

And the light has told him lies.

And the night is close hand, surrounding him with its coolness.

And he asks a woman who has approached him:

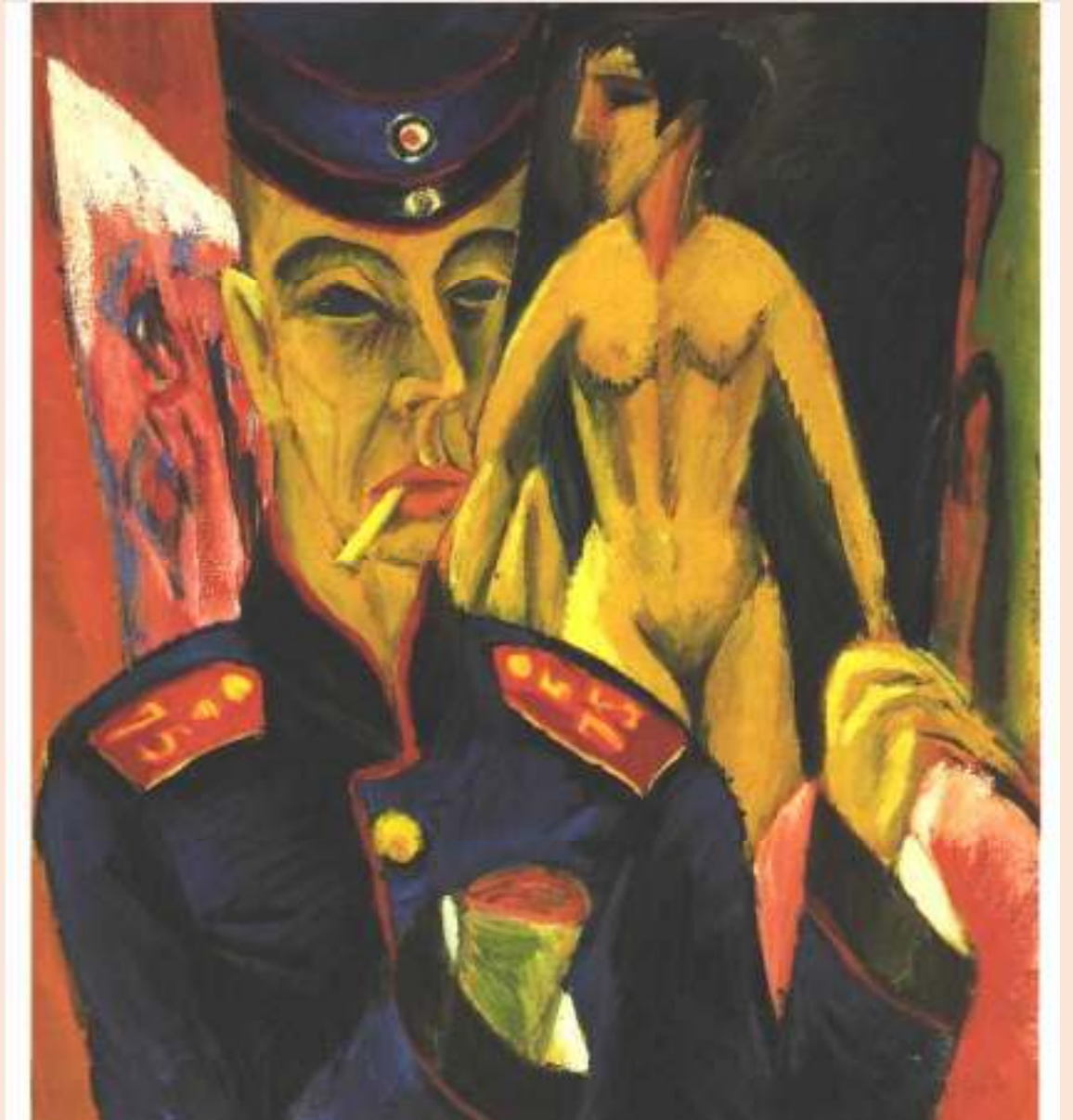
“Are you the night?”

She smiles.

And he is ashamed of the white clothing he wears.

And he'd rather be far away, wearing his armor.

Totally armed.





## V

Is it morning? Which sun is rising?

How large is the sun?

Are those birds? Their singing is everywhere.

It's bright everywhere, but it's not daylight.

There's noise everywhere, but they're not birds.

It's the timbers that are glowing.

It's the windows that are crying out.

And they're screaming, red, to the enemy out there  
in the burning countryside.

They're crying: Fire!

And as they strip the sleep from their faces,

They all rush forth, half-armed, half-naked,

From room to room, from wing to wing, looking  
for the stairway.

And out of breath, with horns blowing in the  
courtyard:

We must muster ourselves!

Muster!

And the drums roar forth.





## VI

But the flag is not there.

They call out: Cornet!

Running horses, prayers, cries, curses: Cornet!

Steel against steel, command and signal,

Silence: Cornet!

And once again: Cornet!

And the cavalry rushes off.

But the flag is not there.

## VII

He is racing through burning hallways,  
Through doors pressing in upon him,  
Up and down steps that scorch him,  
Rushing out of the burning building.  
In his arms he is carrying the flag,  
As if it were a white, unconscious woman.  
And he finds a horse, and he takes off as if with a cry:  
Everything out of the way,  
Past everyone, even his own men.  
And then the flag was raised up in its own way,  
Never before had been so regal.  
And now they see it from a distance, far away.  
And they recognize the shining man, without his helmet.  
And they recognize the flag . . .  
But it begins to glow.  
It rises into the sky, unfurled and red . . .  
Their flag is in flame, in the midst of the foe,  
And they ride away, chasing after it.



**Finale**  
**VIII**

In springtime of the year that followed  
(It arrived sad and cold)  
A courier from the Baron of Pirovano rode slowly into Langenau.  
There, he saw an old woman,  
Weeping.

