

Excerpt from *Drums in the Night*, translated by Finegan Kruckemeyer from the original by Bertolt Brecht. Not to be presented without official licensing. To enquire, please go to: finegankruckemeyer.com

Act Three: Ride of the Valkyries

Street leading to the newspaper district. Red-brick barrack wall from up left to down right. Behind it the city in dim starlight. Night. Wind.

MARIE: Where are you going?

KRAGLER: *[with no cap, collar turned up, hands in his trouser pockets, has entered, whistling]* What kind of red rag is that?

MARIE: Slow down.

KRAGLER: Keep up.

MARIE: Is the devil at your heels or something?

KRAGLER: Do you fancy something devilish? Where's your room?

MARIE: That wouldn't be good.

KRAGLER: Yeah? *[wants to go on]*

MARIE: I've got weak lungs.

KRAGLER: So why follow after me like a dog? I'm throwing no bones.

MARIE: But your wife...

KRAGLER: Shh! That's all over. Finished with - today is written off.

MARIE: So what do you fill it with until tomorrow?

KRAGLER: Honestly - there's sleeping, gin, tobacco... knives.

MARIE: My god...

KRAGLER: Take it easy. I can't handle you screaming like that. There's tobacco too. Look, what do you want me to do? I can pretend to laugh, if that's what you're after. So what happened? Did they lay you on the church steps before your confirmation? Just kidding. Do you smoke? *[he laughs]* Let's get going.

MARIE: They're swimming in gin down there tonight.

KRAGLER: We might be able to help.

Both exit. Wind. Two men in the same direction.

THE ONE: I reckon we'll go now.

THE OTHER: Don't think we'll get a chance down there.

They piss.

THE ONE: We play swords up here, while they fire guns below.

THE OTHER: Bloody hell! In our neighbourhood!

THE ONE: Where the blood is thicker than your watered-down alcohol.
THE OTHER: So what - the moon alone makes them drunk enough!
THE ONE: It helps if you've been selling contaminated tobacco!
THE OTHER: Yeah, but you've backed humans into rat holes!
THE ONE: That won't do you much good!
THE OTHER: Well, I'm not going to be hanged alone.
THE ONE: Scared of heights, are you?
THE OTHER: Finding it hard to breathe, are you?
THE ONE: Only 'cause your decay pollutes the air!
THE OTHER: Oh God!
THE ONE: Just wait 'til they see your bowler hat!
THE OTHER: You're a bowler man too!
THE ONE: Battered, my dear friend.
THE OTHER: I can batter mine.
THE ONE: That stiffened collar will serve as a fine hangman's noose.
THE OTHER: I'm sweating enough to soften it. And you with button boots!
THE ONE: Your weight!
THE OTHER: Your orating!
THE ONE: Your state, your gait, your very manner seals your fate!
THE OTHER: Yeah, they'll hang me for that, but your face is one that's worn an old school tie!
THE ONE: I've got a mangled ear with a bullet hole in it, my friend!
THE OTHER: Devil!

Both exit. Wind. Enter from left the Ride of the Valkyrie: ANNA as if escaping. Beside her in a tailcoat (but no hat) is the waiter MANKE from the Piccadilly Bar, behaving as if drunk. Behind them, BABUSCH drags MURK, who is drunk and bloated.

MANKE: No way! He's gone! Blown away by the winds of change! Or swallowed up in the slums. Everywhere the bullets fly, the slums they cry a chant of chaos. Tonight he may have died a thousand deaths, though one suffice already! *[drunkenly trying to persuade ANNA]* He can run from their shots, but he can also choose not to. Either way, in an hour's time, he'll have disappeared completely - he'll vaporize like reams in rising seas. His eyes can only find the moon. His ears tuned to every drum. Now run! Save your beloved that was, no, is!

BABUSCH: *[throwing himself in front of ANNA]* Halt, you Valkyries! Where are you going? Valhalla lies ahead! Back there it's only cold and icy winds and him held refuge in some drinking hole! *[imitates MANKE]* He may have waited four years, and predated this with

countless dates with death. But left behind as he has been, none need contest his fate. He's fallen by the wayside. No one will find him now.

- MURK: Nobody - not a soul. *[he sits on a stone]*
- BABUSCH: And would you look at him. A drunken mess, where once he strode in button boots the picture of a man secure, with girls on arm. And look - now he's cold and has no idea what to do. He can't be left lying 'round.
- MANKE: That's nothing to do with me! Give him a coat but not your time! That belongs to someone four years in the making, who now runs faster than the clouds above us. He'll outrun this very wind!
- MURK: *[apathetically]* There was poison in the punch. It was all good. And now everything's bad. The apartment was rented, the linen was on its way. Pull up a rock, Bab.
- MANKE: What are you standing around like Lot's wife for? This is no Gomorrah – do you become salty pillars when my back's turned? Does this drunken misery suit your palate? Can you really avoid it? What is it – the linen? Or this piss head here? You really think these sights will slow the clouds?
- BABUSCH: Why do you care? Or know of clouds? You're a waiter!
- MANKE: What do I know? The stars would drop from space and light the Earth if men turned blind eyes to injustice! *[seizes his own throat]* It's driving me too! It's got me by the throat too! We have no right to be petty when a man's scared shitless.
- BABUSCH: What – shitless? Who penned that fine quote? Take it from me – by dawn, the newspaper district will house Pampalona, and the bulls will run and roar their goring discontent. And at the head will be the strongest man, a man whose strength I know, because I've known it all my life.
- MANKE: And he'll go running all the way to Grubb's Gin Palace. If he's lucky, they'll put him up against the wall!
- BABUSCH: He'll prefer the gin palace! Or else he'll round them up and then you'll hear a real racket in the paper plants at dawn... and there's the sound of drums in the night: That'll be him!
- MURK: *[has stood up, whining]* Why drag me around in this wind? I'm sick as a dog. And now you run away! What's up? I can't play 'fetch'! I need you. It's not about the linen.
- ANNA: I just can't.
- MURK: Can you see the state I'm in?
- ANNA: Yes.
- MURK: I can't even stand up anymore.
- MANKE: So sit down! Fuck: you're not the only one! It's infectious. Father gets a stroke. The drunken marsupial cries into her pouch.

But the daughter is going back into the fray – to find a lover who's waited in the wings for four years!

MURK: *[sobering up]* The linen's bought and the apartment's rented. And you'd leave all that to go where?

MANKE: Would you listen to this bastard's carry-on! Where's she going? We'll spell it out – we're off to the big, dirty slums. You know, where you slip in all the vomit on the stairs. Off to the black, gratified corridors, where the wind whistles through.

ANNA: That's where I want to go.

MANKE: We won't give up. Off into the old tenements, rain-soaked and no chance of warmth, as the wind blows open the doors. Maybe it's even worse! Go there! You'll vanish. Those are the houses where they're drumming today, insides crammed full with outsiders like that one there, shirtless and wretched. And everything will last 20 or 30 years, 'til it's the last bastion on Earth. And maybe those souls don't count for nothing, but your soul will be better off amongst them, than anywhere else.

MURK: Your parents are already preparing for our wedding.

ANNA: I can't do it...

MURK: You've got your linen folded. And the furniture's in the rooms.

MANKE: You can fold all you want, but it's useless without the bride.

ANNA: I've bought my linen – it sits in the wardrobe, every piece, but there it can stay. And yes the room's rented, and the curtains are up, and the wallpaper too. But haberdashery's patterns don't matter, so long as I know that my wooer of four years is back.

MURK: A man devoid even of a clean shirt...

MANKE: But with skin underneath like a crocodile's!

MURK: Who you couldn't recognise when he came back on the scene.

MANKE: But she still held a something saved only for him.

ANNA: He's returned with no shoes and a jacket made more of holes than anything else.

MANKE: And the slums would eat him alive! The Gin Palace waves its sweet poison now beneath his nose! The night! The misery! The waste! Save him!

BABUSCH: This reads like a film: The Angel on the Waterfront!

MANKE: Yes, the Angel, the Causeless Rebel!

MURK: And you would go down there? Into the suburbs, into the darkness, the nothing?

ANNA: Yes. Into the nothing I'd sink.

MURK: This is nothing but a drunken frenzy! Nothing but a soap opera! Nothing but the formless snows of yesteryear!

ANNA: Nothing else...

MANKE: That's it – nothing else! Now she knows – there is no greater action than that made for nothing!

MURK: And nothing can change your mind?

ANNA: Nothing I can think of.

MURK: Nothing? Not even the cherry blossom? When there's no more wind touching you, when you're caught in the vacuum of those streets. Won't you still have half your mind on this *other thing*?

ANNA: No. I don't want that anymore.

MURK: You don't want the 'other thing'?

ANNA: It is the rope!

MURK: And it doesn't bind you?

ANNA: It's broken now.

MURK: You don't care about your child?

ANNA: It means nothing.

MURK: Because a coat-less man has come and cut the cord?

ANNA: I didn't recognize him!

MURK: But it's not him! You didn't recognise him!

ANNA: He stood there like a cornered beast outnumbered!

MURK: And we finished him off – every hair.

ANNA: You beat him like an animal!

MURK: And he cried like an old woman!

ANNA: And he cried like a woman!

MURK: And he took off and left you empty!

ANNA: He went... and left me empty.

MURK: Because he was finished.

ANNA: Finished.

MURK: And now he's gone.

ANNA: But when he left and it was over with him...

MURK: There was nothing – nothing more.

ANNA: There was an eddy behind him – it pulled gently – and then it rose and gathered up the leaves and dust until it was stronger than anything else. And now I'm going away, and now I'm coming back, and now it's over for us, me and him, because who knows where he has gone. Can God still track his footsteps, the world so large and him adrift in it? [*she looks calmly at MANKE and says softly*] Go back to your bar. I'm grateful to you – make

sure he goes with you. But you Babusch, you come with me. *[she runs out to the right]*

MURK: *[whining]* Where'd she go? Off into the wind when I'm so pissed. I can't see my hands and she fucks off!

BABUSCH: Ah, of course. Now I see what's happening. Well, my boy, I reckon the ride of the Valkyries is picking up pace. This ghost pond story is no longer as transparent as ghosts or ponds – it's now very serious indeed.

MANKE: The lover has set off, but his betrothed she follows breadcrumb trails from high on wings of love. The hero mourns his Samson locks, but all eyes look to Heaven for ascension.

BABUSCH: But the lover will drag his partner down into the gutter, down all the way to Hell – you and your romantic bullshit!

MANKE: She's vanishing already, as she hurries underground into the suburbs. Like a white flag we see her run, surrendering – like an idea, a final stanza, like a drunken swan low flying over water...

BABUSCH: And what do we do with this wino?

MURK: I'm staying right here. It's cold. And the colder it gets, the sooner they turn back. See, you know nothing – you don't know the 'other thing'. So you let her run. 'Cos he won't want two. He left one behind and got two running after him. *[laughs]*

BABUSCH: Take him home – you should be more worried about how to save your own soul. And now, dear God, she's vanished, like the last half of a final couplet. *[trudges after her]*

MANKE: *[calls after him]* Glubb's Gin Mill on Chaussee St! The hooker with him hangs out at Glubb's Gin Mill! *[drags MURK up and spreads his arms wide]* The revolution is bigger than all of this. Can love find love within it?