

Seeking Nietzsche

by

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CHARACTERS

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE	24-54 years old in the play, but can be played by a middle-aged man. A philosopher, writer, and polemicist.
ELISABETH FÖRSTER-NIETZSCHE	Nietzsche's sister, 22-89 years old in the play, but can be played by middle-aged woman. A devout Christian, anti-semitic supporter of the Nazis.
LOU SALOMÉ	A writer, and eventually a psychiatrist and scholar, as well as the love of Nietzsche's life. Should be played by a woman between 25-35.
RICHARD WAGNER	Famous composer, father figure to Nietzsche. 50s-70s in the play, should be played by a man in that age range.
DOCTOR	A physician who takes care of Nietzsche. (Should be doubled with WAGNER)
NAZI	A soldier who visits Elisabeth in 1932. (Double with Hitler/Man)
MAN	A man, tailor (Double with Nazi/Hitler)
HITLER	Yep, that Hitler. (Double with Nazi/man)

SEEKING NIETZSCHE

By Marcia Eppich-Harris

NIETZSCHE'S HOUSE, 1897.

(Lights up on NIETZSCHE sitting at a messy table with books and papers on it. There is a sick chair nearby.)

NIETZSCHE

Some men are born posthumously, as I was. But in that rebirth, I fear that I am greatly misunderstood.

(Enter Elisabeth and Doctor.)

ELISABETH

For the last eleven years of his life, he languished in madness, confined to this house, under my care.

DOCTOR

You are a good sister, Elisabeth.

NIETZSCHE

And now I am the abyss, staring back at you. Eternally living these moments in the impenetrable darkness, hoping to be found. This is the time. This is the place.

(NIETZSCHE moves to sick in a sick chair and stares, as if catatonic. Exit Doctor. Enter Lou.)

ELISABETH

Lou Salomé. What are *you* doing here?

LOU

Good morning to you, too, Frau Förster-Nietzsche. Hello, dear Friedrich.

ELISABETH

He can't hear you.

LOU

(To Elisabeth) I came to speak to you.

ELISABETH

As you can see, I'm very busy. Or would you like to help with his sponge bath?

LOU

I'm writing a book.

ELISABETH

Good for you.

LOU

This one is titled *Friedrich Nietzsche: The Man and His Works*.

ELISABETH

Do you hear, Friedrich? This tart is writing about you again.

LOU

Friedrich always wanted to be studied. Don't you want someone who knows him and cares for him to interpret his work?

ELISABETH

You need not be that interpreter.

LOU

Why not? I know his philosophy better than most. I'd wager I know them better than you.

ELISABETH

No one knows my brother better than me. Besides, your reputation never impressed me.

LOU

Fortunately, I don't need your admiration. I've already published two books, and my manuscript about Friedrich is nearly finished.

ELISABETH

Then why are you here?

LOU

It certainly wasn't for permission. It was simply a courtesy -- to inform you. And -- I wanted to see him with my own eyes.

ELISABETH

There he is. Now, you may go.

LOU

Has he really been like this for five years?

ELISABETH

Yes. But of course, you knew that, since you know him so well.

LOU

I'd like to talk to him for a while, alone, if you don't mind.

ELISABETH

He won't respond.

LOU

Then you have nothing to fear. Just five minutes. I promise I'll leave then.

ELISABETH

(Grudgingly) Very well.

(ELISABETH exits.)

LOU

Hello, Friedrich. It's good to see you, my friend. Can you hear me?

(He does not respond.)

LOU (Continued)

(Holds his hand) You're hands are so cold. If you were awake, I'm sure you'd never allow me to write about you. I can only imagine how you'd criticize. But friends have insights that individuals cannot understand in themselves. I will be honest, though perhaps not always kind.

(She waits, but he doesn't respond.)

I worry that people won't understand you. And yet, your work becomes more popular by the day.

(NIETZSCHE looks at her for the first time. He's suddenly sane. We flashback to one of their past conversations, roughly 10 years prior. NIETZSCHE stands and takes up his walking stick.

He and LOU link arms and walk together,
as if strolling in the countryside.)

NIETZSCHE

Can you believe the newspapers? Their reviews are
entirely unfair.

LOU

They can't let go of their traditions -- that's all.
The world isn't ready for you yet.

NIETZSCHE

(Laughs) A thinking man needs no one to scrutinize him
-- he does that enough himself.

LOU

Your writing reveals so much about you.

NIETZSCHE

(Coy) Well, one either hides one's opinions or hides
behind them.

LOU

Aphorisms again. Be serious.

NIETZSCHE

What could be more serious than an aphorism?

LOU

Quite evasive today, aren't we?

NIETZSCHE

Discouraged, as usual. It's all that keeps me going --
the hope that one day I will feel differently.

LOU

I've hardly seen you or heard from you. What have you
been up to this summer?

NIETZSCHE

Reading and writing. I was ill most of the previous
season, so I became a hermit to catch up.

LOU

I'm sorry to hear it.

NIETZSCHE

Each segment of my life seems to have been bookended by some illness or another.

LOU

Headaches again?

NIETZSCHE

Blinding pain. Recovery always feels heroic.

LOU

Let me look at you.

(They stop. She looks.)

NIETZSCHE

Anything of note?

LOU

I must admit you have the most beautiful eyes. They have a strange lack of judgment in them.

NIETZSCHE

I have *never* been accused of lacking judgment.

LOU

I can always tell when things are bothering you. You have had a dark time.

NIETZSCHE

I suppose.

LOU

Have you been lonely?

NIETZSCHE

A writer can never feel lonely when he is in a prolific period. I would say I'm preoccupied, but not lonely -- and never lonely when you are in my compass.

LOU

I worry about you Friedrich. I worry about your suffering.

NIETZSCHE

What? That it will kill me? Make me mad? I suspect I will not know if I become mad, and even less will I know if I am dead.

LOU

Your friends will suffer if anything should happen to you.

NIETZSCHE

I do not mean to be pert, but most of you could do with a bit of hardship.

LOU

And yet, that which does not kill me makes me stronger. I swear, I've read that somewhere. (NIETZSCHE laughs) I do worry about you. You've been withdrawn -- I haven't had a letter from you in months.

NIETZSCHE

I apologize.

LOU

You used to write to me every week, sometimes daily.

NIETZSCHE

I've been writing books, not fruitless love letters. If I am to remain a free spirit, I must love my fate.

LOU

Yes, I know.

NIETZSCHE

I continually look for the next idea to preoccupy me, and in solitude, I create my best works.

LOU

They come with much sacrifice.

NIETZSCHE

I should write that down.

LOU

You have. You wrote that to Paul Rée when we were in Italy.

NIETZSCHE

Rée allows you to read my correspondence with him?

LOU

He doesn't *allow* it. I sometimes find it.

NIETZSCHE

(Amused) I should have him return all my letters. I can include them in my autobiography in a section titled, "Why I am so wise."

LOU

(Playing along) "Why I am so clever!"

NIETZSCHE

Behold the man!

(NIETZSCHE seems to go blank. He drops her arm and returns to his chair, catatonic again. We're in 1897 again.)

LOU

(Wistfully) Behold the man. My writing will do you justice, Friedrich. I promise you.

(LOU pats his shoulder, kisses his forehead, and exits.)

NIETZSCHE

(As if in a dream) Whatever has been given to the soul, has it not been bestowed through suffering? And through the great discipline of suffering?

(NIETZSCHE goes catatonic. Enter ELISABETH with DOCTOR. Still in 1897.)

DOCTOR

Any changes since last we spoke?

ELISABETH

His headaches continue, and he sometimes screams all night long.

DOCTOR

Does he respond to the medication?

ELISABETH

It appears to dull the pain. At least he can sleep.

DOCTOR

(Comes to NIETZSCHE's side) Herr Professor Nietzsche, how are you today?

(No response from NIETZSCHE.)

ELISABETH

He hasn't been a professor for a long time.

DOCTOR

Would you prefer I call him Fritz?

ELISABETH

Not even I call him that.

(DOCTOR checks his eyes, pulse, uses a stethoscope to listen to his heart and lungs.)

DOCTOR

Nothing out of the ordinary today.

(DOCTOR takes a bottle with some liquid in it and a dropper out of his pocket and gives it to ELISABETH.)

DOCTOR (Continued)

This should keep you until I come around again.

ELISABETH

Thank you, Herr Doctor. I . . . I only wish he knew how well his books are selling now -- how venerated his work is.

DOCTOR

Due in no small part to your efforts.

ELISABETH

I do hope so.

DOCTOR

The archive you're creating is remarkable.

ELISABETH

Mother and I kept every scrap of paper he ever doodled on. (Indicates papers on the table) I have a plan for these fragments, too.

DOCTOR

A magnum opus?

ELISABETH

I intend to call it *The Will to Power*.

(NIETZSCHE leaps from his chair, animated, and addresses the audience, speaking the beginning lines of *The Will to Power*.)

ELISABETH and DOCTOR mime talking in the background, while Nietzsche is speaking. They do not see NIETZSCHE, who addresses the audience.)

NIETZSCHE

Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests?

ELISABETH

(Indicating the writing) Even I don't always understand everything he's saying.

NIETZSCHE

It is an error to consider "social distress" or "physiological degeneration" or, worse, corruption as the cause of nihilism.

ELISABETH

I must, therefore, interpret it for the world.

NIETZSCHE

Distress, whether of the soul, body, or intellect, cannot of itself give birth to nihilism.

ELISABETH

He used to say that madness would be a blessing -- a Dionysian ideal.

NIETZSCHE

It is in *Christian morals* that nihilism is rooted!

ELISABETH

Being mad would strip him of the societal norms ingrained in us since birth. Now look at him.

NIETZSCHE

Do you know what nihilism means? It is when the question "Why?" finds no answer.

DOCTOR

Poor man. He is lucky to have you.

ELISABETH

Thank you.

(DOCTOR and ELISABETH look at the empty chair as if Nietzsche were still sitting there. DOCTOR leans down toward empty chair, as if to address NIETZSCHE)

DOCTOR

Until next week, Herr Professor. Take good care.
(DOCTOR and ELISABETH exit, leaving NIETZSCHE alone on stage.)

NIETZSCHE

To my sister, I am no longer a man. She houses me as an artifact. Elisabeth invites people to come look at me, as if I were a zoo animal, then takes them to the parlor to look through my history: (dramatically) the *NIETZSCHE ARCHIVE*. She kept prayers I wrote as a child, poetry, drawings, the music I composed. My manuscripts.

(Enter ELISABETH carrying NIETZSCHE's book, *Human, All Too Human*. She is furious. YEAR: 1878)

ELISABETH

(Brandishing the book) What is this, Friedrich?

NIETZSCHE

(Looks at the audience) It's 1878. (To ELISABETH) My book, *Human, All Too Human*.

ELISABETH

I cannot believe you would bring such disgrace upon this household.

NIETZSCHE

What, precisely, do you object to?

ELISABETH

Can you really be serious? (Flips through the book)
All of it.

NIETZSCHE

This book says important things! It critiques our new religion -- science. What would you rather witness?

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

The secretions made in the mouth of a soprano as she sings, or that same woman on stage, singing beautifully, with no knowledge of her secretions? Science can explain the mechanics of the voice, but not the mysterious glory of its good use. I'm telling you -- science has eliminated the *need* for God, and I mourn this.

ELISABETH

You had always seemed so faithful to me.

NIETZSCHE

One always desires to believe. Yet, our age is one in which faith has been stripped clear away -- replaced by evidentiary science. God is dead, and we have killed him.

ELISABETH

God is dead? Have you forgotten that our father was a minister? And his father before him? How you could say something so anti-Christian is astounding. Do you not fear God?

NIETZSCHE

Fear God? Certainly not.

ELISABETH

You should. (Gesturing to the book) There's no *truth*? Only interpretations? Bah!

(ELISABETH turns away from NIETZSCHE in a huff.)

NIETZSCHE

Dear sister, you've *actually* read it. All my friends ignore the content and congratulate me for having (makes air quotes) "gotten this far."

ELISABETH

Of course I read it. (Turns to face NIETZSCHE) And I'm here to tell you -- there are some things that are incontrovertible.

NIETZSCHE

Name one.

ELISABETH

One plus one equals two.

NIETZSCHE

If a man and a woman share a bed, do they not become one? And becoming one, they create a moment in which one plus one equals one. (Thinks again) Or sometimes three.

ELISABETH

I am a lady. How dare you speak of such things to me?

NIETZSCHE

Then come up with your own incontrovertible truths.

ELISABETH

Fine -- here's one. God exists.

NIETZSCHE

That's a matter of opinion. Anything else?

ELISABETH

I am a woman.

(NIETZSCHE crosses his arms skeptically.)

ELISABETH (Continued)

You'll have to take my word for it.

NIETZSCHE

We know from Copernicus that the earth rotates and circles around the sun -- completely contradicting my senses. If Copernicus is right, we must ignore the evidence right before our eyes.

ELISABETH

Copernicus's theory exposes the truth. You, on the other hand, are trying to destroy civilization.

NIETZSCHE

Civilization, as we know it, destroys the human spirit. Christianity forces us to deny our own instincts.

ELISABETH

(Exasperated) It's a good thing I love you. Or would you like to question that, too?

NIETZSCHE

My dear llama, there are very few things that I do not question. One is your love for me.

ELISABETH

Thank the lord. Your *llama* would fight you to the death about that.

NIETZSCHE

Do you mind that I still call you llama, sister?

ELISABETH

Not at all. It shows a distinct truth -- I am as stubborn as a llama.

NIETZSCHE

I do hope you spit less.

ELISABETH

Spit?

NIETZSCHE

But like a llama, you would stop eating and lie down and die if someone tried to force you to do something you didn't want to do.

ELISABETH

(Rolling her eyes) So dramatic.

NIETZSCHE

Perhaps I ought to start calling you by your given name. It would free us from the misleading significance of words.

ELISABETH

I like being a llama.

NIETZSCHE

Histrionic, my dear. You should be a follower of Dionysus.

ELISABETH

Dionysus is *your* hero -- not mine.

NIETZSCHE

Sometimes he is, sometimes he isn't.

ELISABETH

You are so mercurial. Is there nothing you believe to be unassailable and true?

NIETZSCHE

People interpret things in their own ways. Each determines his own truth, even if you think it's a lie.

ELISABETH

And what, pray tell, would be the consequences if every rascalion had the freedom to determine the truth for himself?

NIETZSCHE

They already do, whether they have the audacity to say it or not. What are you worried about, llama? The lower classes?

ELISABETH

Don't be so elitist. You all visit the same whores.

NIETZSCHE

How dare you suggest such a thing?

ELISABETH

Worried I'll tell your secrets?

NIETZSCHE

I'm worried you'll get them wrong.

(ELISABETH tosses the book on the table and exits. Transition to YEAR: 1872, early career, when *The Birth of Tragedy* was published.)

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

(To audience) When I was a young man trying to overcome my inherited path toward becoming a member of the clergy, I began to study philology, the classics, and then suddenly I was a professor. My first real book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, was published in 1872. It was an ode to the dramatic musical composer, Richard Wagner. What I really wanted, though, was to become a philosopher.

(Enter WAGNER.)

WAGNER

My dear Friedrich, I devoured *The Birth of Tragedy*.
Cosima and I are enthralled by your genius.

NIETZSCHE

(Introducing him to the audience) Richard Wagner, my
dear friend.

WAGNER

Music *is* the quintessential art -- I do agree -- and
my musical dramas all the more so.

NIETZSCHE

I am so pleased that you enjoyed it. Your operas will
usher in a new era of European culture, Richard.

WAGNER

Shall we start with Germany first?

NIETZSCHE

Have you no further ambition?

WAGNER

On the contrary. But do you not believe German culture
to be superior to the rest of Europe? Who could
possibly best Beethoven? Except, of course, me.

NIETZSCHE

My devotion to the ancient world gives me more of a
European sensibility, of course.

WAGNER

Yes, with Apollo and Dionysus as your guides.

NIETZSCHE

Dionysus suits me better. What *ecstasy* there is to be
found in art. As Schopenhauer said, without art,
humans could not cope with the misery of existence.

WAGNER

With music the purest expression of will --

NIETZSCHE

And beauty --

WAGNER

And power.

NIETZSCHE

Come, play for me from your new drama. I have yet to drink of its delights.

WAGNER

Later, my friend. We'll need a singer so you can fully experience it. Without the words, the music is diminished.

NIETZSCHE

As you wish.

WAGNER

How is life in academia, Friedrich?

NIETZSCHE

It could be better. I was denied the chair of Philosophy.

WAGNER

What? But you're developing into the world's finest thinker.

NIETZSCHE

I am honored that you think so. Mixing of disciplines is not particularly celebrated in my academic circle. Perhaps in music things are different.

WAGNER

I was hoping you could help me rouse support from the academy, Friedrich. I need more money for the theatre I'm building.

NIETZSCHE

(Joking) You assume I have wealthy friends.

WAGNER

They earn a stable income at least.

NIETZSCHE

If it's money you need, would you take it from philistines whose closed minds deny innovation?

WAGNER

My dear Nietzsche, when one has a vision, one takes money from any fool who will part with it.

NIETZSCHE

Truly anyone?

WAGNER

Well, not Jews.

NIETZSCHE

(Startled) Jews?

WAGNER

Now, your father was a minister. Don't tell me you favor those power hungry Israelites.

NIETZSCHE

(Bothered) What?

WAGNER

The *chosen* race. Bah. You're still young, Friedrich. You haven't seen how they try to infiltrate everything.

NIETZSCHE

No. I haven't.

WAGNER

Well, take my word for it. They're like stinking dragons, hoarding their wealth. We really ought to take it back from them.

NIETZSCHE

Hmm. . .

WAGNER

Now then, Cosima and I would be delighted if you would come with us to Bayreuth. We are laying the foundation stone of the Festival theatre there in two weeks' time, and we would be very honored to have you as our guest.

NIETZSCHE

(Still disturbed, but trying to hide it) Thank you, Richard. I shall try.

WAGNER

Friedrich, you *must* come. It will be the grandest theatre of all time, setting a precedent for all theatre in the future. You want to be a part of history, do you not?

NIETZSCHE

Certainly.

WAGNER

It's settled then. I shall make the arrangements. You should read us your latest work on the way.

NIETZSCHE

If the bumping of the carriage allows me to see straight, I will.

WAGNER

Wonderful. And if you happen to find any colleagues who are interested in investing in a theatre --

NIETZSCHE

Of course.

WAGNER

Excellent. Those who have vision and the power to fulfill it must find their benefactors.

(WAGNER pats NIETZSCHE on the shoulder and exits.)

NIETZSCHE

And he who fights with so-called monsters should look to it that he does not become a monster himself. (To the audience) But I overlooked his faults for a long time. When one loses his father at a young age, one continually looks for a father-figure to replace him. Richard Wagner became that missing person in my life. But I needed more. In 1882, I found her.

(Enter LOU. NIETZSCHE takes up his walking stick and he and LOU link arms, taking their first ever walk together.)

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

I am so pleased to make your acquaintance Frauline Salomé. Paul Rée speaks so highly of you.

LOU

And has Paul told you of my plan?

NIETZSCHE

Yes, indeed. It is very brave of you.

LOU

What is brave about living in an intellectual commune?

NIETZSCHE

With two men? Who are neither related to you, nor married to you? In this society, it stands to reason that you're putting your reputation at risk.

LOU

Only if one cares about her reputation.

NIETZSCHE

You are quite the free spirit. I admire that immensely.

LOU

Surely you do not care about reputation. You, who have written, "God is dead and we have killed him."

NIETZSCHE

We have killed God with our own enlightenment. We should become Gods ourselves to be worthy of such a murder.

LOU

And what kind of god would you be?

NIETZSCHE

One who lives according to his instincts, without waiting for approval.

LOU

Indeed. There is nothing divine about subjecting oneself to a moral prison.

NIETZSCHE

I believe precisely that! For a woman to embrace my philosophy is astonishing, to be honest. Refreshing.

LOU

Did you think it could not be done?

NIETZSCHE

Not outside the brothel. Ladies of the night do not care much for society's mandates.

LOU

Nor do I.

(NIETZSCHE stops to look at her, sexual tension on high.)

LOU

Do not look at me like a wolf, Herr Nietzsche. I have no interest in sexual relations. I intend to live by my pen.

NIETZSCHE

And a healthy allowance, I'd wager. If my family had money, I would not be so concerned about my book sales.

LOU

My mother has threatened to cut me off. But she'll come around.

NIETZSCHE

Would it help if . . . I married you?

LOU

(Laughs) Oh please.

NIETZSCHE

I confess, Frauline Salomé --

LOU

Please call me "Lou." If you're proposing to someone, a first name is quite fine, though you've only known me for half an hour.

NIETZSCHE

You are incredibly beautiful.

LOU

I would cover my body in sack cloth if it got a man to consider my mind before he considered my beauty.

NIETZSCHE

It is your daring that makes you so beautiful.

LOU

(Laughs) Quite!

NIETZSCHE

Paul says that you are the most intelligent woman in Europe.

LOU

He asked me to marry him, too.

NIETZSCHE

What?

LOU

And he knows my mind better than you!

NIETZSCHE

Are you marrying Paul Rée?

LOU

No, of course not. I don't need a man to give me permission to live the way I want and to write what I'd like. I don't need society's permission either.

NIETZSCHE

I believe I'm falling in love with you.

LOU

So much the worse for you. I have no interest in love and marriage.

NIETZSCHE

Do you know what I've always thought to be terrible? Young ladies are told how sinful their desires are, and how forbidden they are from them. Yet, when they are married, they are expected to sacrifice themselves on the altar of their husband's lust. Sex becomes a shameful, terror-ridden duty, rather than the instinctive, natural glory that it can be. Our society destroys women's natural ability to feel pleasure.

LOU

You speak the truth.

NIETZSCHE

I cannot blame you for your hesitation. Nor any woman. I blame your upbringing.

LOU

(Sexily) Society has not taken everything from women.
I'm still permitted to torment men.

NIETZSCHE

I can imagine.

LOU

I could tease you, if you'd like.

NIETZSCHE

Nothing would give me greater pleasure.

LOU

Then come live with me and Paul. We can talk for hours
and read each others' work. It will be a pleasant
torment for you.

NIETZSCHE

How am I supposed not to fall in love with you with
such a declaration?

LOU

I trust you'll find a way. After all, your motive to
marry is simply to fulfill society's demands on me.
You're confusing love with convention.

NIETZSCHE

I admit that even I who reject society's moral code am
still subject to its tentacles.

LOU

We must pay attention to the lies we tell ourselves,
Professor Nietzsche.

NIETZSCHE

You may call me Friedrich. If you're going to live
with a man, you might as well call him by his first
name.

LOU

Do you think *you* will ever marry, Friedrich?

NIETZSCHE

Who knows? Success or failure in that regard will
answer the question eventually.

LOU

You have failed today, I'm afraid. (Puts her face close to his, as if she's about to kiss him, but doesn't.) But there may be another girl for you out there.

(NIETZSCHE holds his position, and stares at her lips.)

NIETZSCHE

I doubt it.

(NIETZSCHE moves away, and LOU smiles, knowing she is has power over him.)

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

(Sighs) You're right. I am no better than cattle -- one with a herd mentality.

LOU

I'm sure you'll overcome it.

NIETZSCHE

Schopenhauer said that we must spend our lives becoming who we are. It's a good point. The individual has a right to *become* who he is -- evolve and express his genuine passions.

LOU

Or *hers*.

NIETZSCHE

Naturally. Women, I am told, have passions. Not you of course.

LOU

Just because my passion lies apart from my nether-regions does not mean I am dispassionate.

NIETZSCHE

You speak as one who took your bodily passions away.

LOU

(Lying) I don't know what you mean, you audacious man.

NIETZSCHE

Ah, but you were being so honest with me. Someone made you despise your instincts. Don't let them.

(NIETZSCHE returns to his chair, and goes catatonic, leaving LOU alone. She finds a pen and journal, and starts to write, speaking aloud to the audience as she does.)

LOU

It was the spring of 1882 when I first met Nietzsche in Rome. His studied, elegant posture surprised and deceived me. But soon, I came to know him, and a question surfaced:

NIETZSCHE

(Coming to himself) "Whenever a person permits a mask to become visible, one can ask: 'what does it hide?'"

LOU

Nietzsche's inner life was built on loneliness -- a steadily growing self-isolation and preoccupation with himself.

NIETZSCHE

A thinker must observe the world from afar. But writers are misunderstood to be isolationists. Every book I've ever read is with me as I write, every person I've ever met, every character, every interaction.

LOU

(Still writing) His claims were nothing less than intensive probings into the human psyche for its undiscovered world and for its still unfinished possibilities.

(Exit LOU.)

NIETZSCHE

(To the audience) It's true that I wrote about my own life and disappointments. There were many. It's almost impossible for a writer to divorce himself from his work. How could he? Does he not pour his soul into it? Even if fictionalized or analyzed from a great distance, the single kernel of truth could be responsible for an entire opus. My obsessions and disappointments drove my writing. And what did I write about more than any other subject? Richard Wagner.

(Enter WAGNER.)

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

1869, I'm at Wagner's house, staying with him, as I do every summer. (Sees Wagner) You slept late, my friend.

WAGNER

What a storm raged last night.

NIETZSCHE

Indeed -- like some great tragedy.

WAGNER

When I finally nodded off, I could not compel myself to rise.

NIETZSCHE

I hope you're rested now.

WAGNER

Yes, all is well. Cosima survived and is resting.

NIETZSCHE

Was Cosima ill last night?

WAGNER

My dear Friedrich, she gave birth during the storm. Did no one tell you?

NIETZSCHE

Gave birth? Why, no. I had no idea.

WAGNER

You think that amount of moaning and crying just naturally happens in our household?

NIETZSCHE

(Shrugs) I was reading.

WAGNER

No wonder you're going blind.

NIETZSCHE

I had several lanterns lit.

WAGNER

Aren't you interested in the least about what happened with the child?

NIETZSCHE

Not really. (Realizes this is a mistake.) Uh, was it a boy or a girl?

WAGNER

A strapping boy. We'll call him Siegfried after the hero of my next drama.

NIETZSCHE

Congratulations. (Beat) I confess I know nothing about children. Forgive my ignorance.

WAGNER

No apology necessary, Friedrich.

NIETZSCHE

I was only five years old when my father died. He was a brilliant pianist -- he could sit at a piano and improvise for hours, creating the most incredible melodies. My mother insisted that I learn piano to honor his memory.

WAGNER

You did inherit his gift of improvisation.

NIETZSCHE

My secret desire was to be a composer.

WAGNER

Yes, your compositions are. . . interesting.

NIETZSCHE

(To audience) The worst pejorative anyone could ever utter about work of art: interesting. (To Wagner) I wanted to be just like my father. He was a priest in the Lutheran church, as was his father before him. Can you imagine? Me? A priest?

WAGNER

Only as one of the unfaithful.

NIETZSCHE

Right you are. Well, may you be the father that Siegfried needs and desires.

WAGNER

Here, here! What were you reading that so distracted you from maternal misery last night?

NIETZSCHE

I was revisiting Schopenhauer.

WAGNER

Ah, Schopenhauer. His philosophy was a great influence on my *Tristan and Isolde*.

NIETZSCHE

But surely you do not think that the only way to attain peace is to renounce desire, as Schopenhauer says.

WAGNER

I try to channel all my desire into my music.

NIETZSCHE

(To audience) That accounts for all the illegitimate children.

WAGNER

But it's true that without desire, I would not have had the life I have.

NIETZSCHE

Certainly not. I am of the mind that one's desires are natural. Tristan cannot hide his love for Isolde, even in the light of day.

WAGNER

But it is only fulfilled in the dark of night.

NIETZSCHE

That opera was what made me love your work so much. The libretto is magnificent -- and the music? The Tristan chord? It will change music forever.

WAGNER

It *is* one of my finest works, although your loyalty to it may change when you hear my Ring dramas.

NIETZSCHE

You never forget your first love. Even in my darkest moments, I can hear the melodies of your operas in my mind. They are a comfort.

WAGNER

Your admiration means more to me than even the birth of my son.

(WAGNER exits and NIETZSCHE sits in his sick chair, staring as LOU enters. She writes in her journal, reading aloud to the audience as she writes.)

LOU

That phase in Nietzsche's life also stood for those deepest inner needs for personal adoration, for being looked up to, for fullest gratification -- which later and painfully had to find gratification through the self. The happiness of that time came from his valuable, personal relationship with Wagner and their mutual love for one another.

(LOU goes to NIETZSCHE and caresses his face, then exits. NIETZSCHE starts humming a bit of a melody over and over again -- something from *Tristan and Isolde*. Enter ELISABETH.)

ELISABETH

Thinking of Wagner again, are you?

NIETZSCHE

He was an actor. Not a composer.

ELISABETH

(Shocked that he's lucid) Friedrich?

NIETZSCHE

He made my lungs ache. It pained me to listen to his work.

ELISABETH

Oh darling, you're awake.

NIETZSCHE

Do I not suffer enough?

ELISABETH

Calm down, dear. Here -- can I get you anything?

NIETZSCHE

No sympathy. No sympathy. Wagner is a slave to gold, not a free spirit.

ELISABETH

Wagner is dead, Friedrich. Let me get you some tea.

NIETZSCHE

I feel no sympathy for him. He should have gone with you to Paraguay.

ELISABETH

(Stops short) What about Paraguay?

NIETZSCHE

Had Wagner gone to Paraguay with you, he would have died sooner.

ELISABETH

(Coldly) Enough about Paraguay. I'm here now, and I'm not going anywhere.

NIETZSCHE

You paid much to rid yourself of Jewish company.

ELISABETH

(Furious) And I would do it again. Nueva Germania was a noble quest, a colony that might have become a great Aryan nation in the midst of savages.

NIETZSCHE

Even your husband saw how hopeless it was.

ELISABETH

Shut up. Just shut up.

NIETZSCHE

Humans are not meant for pity. It makes them weak.

ELISABETH

Why are you tormenting me, Friedrich? Have I not taken care of you for years? Bathing you, changing your clothes, feeding you, tending you like a child? And you wake, today, only to trample my wounded heart? Who do you think you are?

NIETZSCHE

I am dynamite. I am Zarathustra.

ELISABETH

You are Friedrich Nietzsche, mad man, and some-time philosopher.

NIETZSCHE

In the night, I am the lover of Isolde, waiting for bliss and for death.

ELISABETH

I cannot take this, Friedrich.

NIETZSCHE

Where is Lou?

ELISABETH

(Disgusted) Lou Salomé. I think I liked you better when you were silent.

(Nietzsche goes catatonic again.
Elisabeth hesitates, then goes to him.)

ELISABETH (Continued)

Friedrich? Friedrich?

(ELISABETH stands and goes to the notebooks with all of NIETZSCHE'S unpublished writing in them.)

ELISABETH (Continued)

(To the audience) He never dated any of these notebooks. He knew he was going to be a great man -- you'd think he'd have kept better records to facilitate the process. You have no idea how much work I have done to shape his greatness.

(ELISABETH starts to weep into her hands. NIETZSCHE speaks to the audience, but she cannot hear him.)

NIETZSCHE

In my madness, I hear her speaking, and cannot respond. She has no apprehension of my work. She follows not Zarathustra.

ELISABETH

I'll have to call on his friends to read his writing. It is almost indecipherable.

NIETZSCHE

Again and again and again and again. I see my life before my eyes. Spread out in time and all at once. But life has gone on for my sister. I live each day over and over and over.

(ELISABETH wipes her eyes and goes to NIETZSCHE's side.)

ELISABETH

Do you want some tea, Friedrich? (He doesn't respond) I don't know why I even ask.

(ELISABETH starts to make tea for herself.)

NIETZSCHE

(To audience, pointing) There is Lou. The woman I loved. (Points) There is Wagner. His Tristan chord -- a frightful harmony that made me quiver with desire for resolution. (Points) There is Zarathustra. I am him.

ELISABETH

I'll make sure the barber comes, Friedrich. You're getting a little long in the mustache, even for you.

NIETZSCHE

(To audience) Eternal recurrence. You live your life over again, in every day, in every action, in every thought. No moment is left behind. You are the cumulation of time and your actions -- a character in your own plot.

ELISABETH

(To audience) He is so calm some days.

NIETZSCHE

(To audience) Are you the hero or the monster?

ELISABETH

(To NIETZSCHE) It's chilly today, don't you think? Perhaps I should bring you a shawl.

NIETZSCHE

(To audience) You must overcome, overcome and become the übermensch, the man who has mastered himself. He who has achieved his fullest potential.

ELISABETH

Oh, how I miss our conversations, brother.

(NIETZSCHE stands and lectures the audience, as if teaching. Not mad, but professorial)

NIETZSCHE

We must return to our natural state. Humans are not meant to smother their instincts. We must feel all to know all. You must distrust all in whom the impulse to punish is powerful. They will tear your soul apart and reform it in their image. You will no longer be yourself.

ELISABETH

(To the empty sick chair.) If only mother were still here. It's just not fair that I'm here all alone.

NIETZSCHE

(To audience) Those who speak of justice -- if they had power, they, too, would be Pharisees -- the men who campaigned against Jesus. The only difference between a fundamentalist and a Pharisee is the amount of influence they have.

ELISABETH

(To the empty chair) I pray for you continually.

NIETZSCHE

(To audience) Good and evil, rich and poor, high and low -- words are weapons. And justice says unto me, "Men are *not equal*." How could we be? Yes, we might all cross a tight rope over an abyss, but some carry bricks, while others are wheeled. You cannot tell me that our burdens are meaningless. They shape us. Confound us. And who determines a man's ease? Our culture. Our culture said that a man is better than a woman or a Christian better than a Jew. It is unnatural, but it is the culture that Christians built. So how, within a Christian culture, can we dare say that all are equals? Open your eyes!

ELISABETH

(To the empty chair) Do you hear me, Friedrich?

NIETZSCHE

(To audience) We cross the chasm with our burdens to become who we are. No longer beasts, but the superman.

ELISABETH

(To the empty chair) I wish you heard me.

(NIETZSCHE resumes his seat in the sick chair and stares again. Elisabeth goes to pour the tea. She brings him a cup, and holds it to his mouth.)

ELISABETH (Continued)

Drink, Friedrich.

(He stares, but drinks some tea. She wipes his mouth for him.)

ELISABETH (Continued)

There. That's lovely, isn't it?

(ELISABETH puts the cup down, turns away from NIETZSCHE. She hears his next line.)

NIETZSCHE

A pen is a feather.

(ELISABETH looks closely at NIETZSCHE.)

ELISABETH

(To NIETZSCHE) The Nietzsche name *will mean something someday*.

NIETZSCHE

A pen is a feather.

ELISABETH

Germany will build an army of your supermen and will dominate the world.

NIETZSCHE

A pen is a feather.

ELISABETH

We shall see to it that Germany dominates the world. And it will all be because of you.

(ELISABETH pats his shoulder and exits. Enter LOU. NIETZSCHE picks up his walking stick and goes to her.)

NIETZSCHE

It's as if you always know when I need you.

LOU

We live together, darling, I see you every day.

NIETZSCHE

You don't understand.

LOU

What's the matter?

NIETZSCHE

I am doomed.

LOU

Doomed to what? Burn in the fires of Hell? My dear Friedrich, I know you do *not* believe in such rubbish.

NIETZSCHE

No, no, doomed to oblivion. The books don't sell. The critics are either silent or cutting. It's like I've committed a crime.

LOU

(Chiding, to try to cheer him up) Save your gloomy thoughts for your writing. Transpose your somber thoughts into philosophical music.

NIETZSCHE

We are all composers, conducting our lives. It's what's left behind that I worry about.

LOU

Never worry about that.

NIETZSCHE

How can I not?

LOU

You have friends -- me, Paul, Peter Gast, so many others. We will never allow you to be lost to oblivion.

NIETZSCHE

Oblivion would be better than being misunderstood.

LOU

You're perseverating.

NIETZSCHE

Or prophesying. Perhaps that's why I'm going blind -- I'll be like the prophets of old.

LOU

Blind, but with a second sight.

NIETZSCHE

I'm glad you're here.

LOU

Me, too.

NIETZSCHE

I've been afflicted with failure -- first, I failed my family -- rejecting the ministry. Then, I failed as a musician, as a professor, as a philosopher, as a writer --

LOU

And yet, there are some among your friends who refuse to agree with you.

NIETZSCHE

Then I have also failed to make my case.

LOU

Do not wallow in self-doubt, Friedrich. It might be mistaken for humility.

NIETZSCHE

(Laughs) You're right. Humble myself? That would never do. No, my dear. The greatest project of my life will be overcoming myself.

LOU

That, or becoming who you are.

NIETZSCHE

If only you would allow me.

(NIETZSCHE drops to one knee, and holds LOU's hand.)

NIETZSCHE

Please. I love you.

LOU

I cannot marry you.

NIETZSCHE

I know you're not interested in a physical relationship. Whatever that man did to you -- whoever he was -- that is not what love is.

LOU

(Silent for a moment, working through her past torment.) I know that. It's not you. If anyone were going to be my husband, it would be you. Friedrich, I do care for you; you and Paul are my best friends. But I will not marry anyone.

NIETZSCHE

You're only twenty-one. You may change your mind.

LOU

And you are thirty-eight. You're old enough to be my father.

NIETZSCHE

That isn't unusual in our culture.

LOU

(Teasing him) Don't defend cultural norms when it suits your purpose, you great hypocrite.

NIETZSCHE

(Laughs) There I go again.

LOU

It's all irrelevant. I will not marry.

NIETZSCHE

Fine.

(NIETZSCHE rises from his knee.)

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

I appreciate that you know what you want in life.

LOU

And I do want you to be a part of it. Come on a holiday with me and Paul.

NIETZSCHE

Of course. If you wish me to come.

LOU

Nothing would please me more.

NIETZSCHE

Would you be interested in a detour first? The Bayreuth Festival is in two months.

LOU

(Excited) All the elites of Europe will be there!

NIETZSCHE

I'm unsure whether *I* will be there.

LOU

(Disappointed) Oh. Why are you inviting me then?

NIETZSCHE

As a founding member of the Patron's Society, I have the right to purchase tickets -- they're impossible for most people to obtain. If Wagner invites me, I shall attend, but I thought if not, perhaps you would be interested in going with my sister.

LOU

Your sister? Why not you?

NIETZSCHE

Wagner is premiering his new opera, *Parsifal*. I cannot suffer the foolishness of this obscenely Christian libretto. Wagner sent me the score. Of course, I couldn't help but play through it.

LOU

What did you think?

NIETZSCHE

That man's music will always have a hold on me, even if his librettos are pathetically anti-semitic and nationalistic -- and now *Christian*. If you can ignore the story, you'll love it.

LOU

Oh Friedrich, would you really give me your tickets to Bayreuth?

NIETZSCHE

I'd like you and Elisabeth to get to know one another. Perhaps you could help her.

LOU

Help her? How?

NIETZSCHE

She's only two years younger than me and has not fetched a husband yet. Perhaps if she were around you she could learn a thing or two about attracting men.

LOU

(Laughs, then sexily) And repelling them.

NIETZSCHE

You are a tenacious flirt, Ms. Salomé. Why do you think I keep proposing to you?

(Lou comes close to him, in a seductive manner and brushes her hand against his cheek.)

LOU

(Sexy) You should never take me seriously, Friedrich.

NIETZSCHE

I enjoy the agony.

LOU

(Sexy) Oh, I can make you suffer. Paul will be so jealous. He often is. I have said many times that nothing entertains me in bed so much as reading the letters you write me.

NIETZSCHE

Sometimes when I'm alone, I say your name aloud.

LOU

(Thrilled) Does it please you to hear it?

NIETZSCHE

Like nothing else.

LOU

Not even Wagner?

NIETZSCHE

Not even close.

LOU

After the festival, let's meet somewhere, so I can tell you all about it.

NIETZSCHE

Let's meet in Tautenburg.

LOU

Yes. In the meantime, no more talk of your failure. You have time to establish yourself as a philosopher -- you're not that old.

NIETZSCHE

My father was two years younger than I am now when he died.

LOU

Well, you have something your father did not.

NIETZSCHE

What?

LOU

Someone who believes in you. Now then. Let's make our plans. I can meet Elisabeth in Leipzig and go to Bayreuth from there. Do let me know if Wagner writes to you. It would be exquisite to have you there.

(NIETZSCHE kisses her hand in a gentlemanly way.)

NIETZSCHE

Only if I am sent for.

(NIETZSCHE exits. Enter ELISABETH.)

ELISABETH

You must be Frauline Salomé.

LOU

Frauline Nietzsche. It is a pleasure.

ELISABETH

I am so pleased that my brother is introducing us at last.

LOU

I do so want to make a good impression on my dear Friedrich's sister. We will have such a lovely time.

ELISABETH

I do hope so.

(Enter WAGNER. Sees ELISABETH.)

WAGNER

Good of you to come. Thank you for your patronage.

ELISABETH

Herr Wagner, we met once before. My brother, Friedrich Nietzsche, introduced us you might recall.

WAGNER

Nietzsche. (Exasperated) Never speak his name in front of me again. Why isn't he here himself?

LOU

Oh dear.

ELISABETH

Pardon me, sir, but I believe he was waiting for an invitation.

WAGNER

Clearly he had the opportunity to purchase tickets. Excuse me.

(WAGNER exits. LOU and ELISABETH look at each other, worried.)

LOU

This seems an inauspicious beginning to our adventure, Frauline Nietzsche.

ELISABETH

(Trying to recover) Call me Elisabeth if you'd like.

LOU

Come, Elisabeth. Let's focus on the real reason we're here. There are parties everywhere.

ELISABETH

(Coy, obviously not a flirter) I'll follow your lead.
 (LOU and ELISABETH parade around the stage, as if meeting several people. Enter NIETZSCHE, reading a letter. Each woman reads her own letter to NIETZSCHE aloud, and stand apart from each other to do so.)

ELISABETH (Continued)

(Reading) "My dear brother. How could you have sent me on this journey with Lou Salomé? Whatever spiritual sisterhood you dreamed we would have had has been thwarted by her brazenness."

(Nietzsche takes out another letter and reads, as Lou stands aside and reads aloud from a letter she has written to him.)

LOU

"My dear Friedrich, Bayreuth is wonderful. I have made so many acquaintances with theatre people. I must say, Wagner is an ass. But darling, the scene is delightful. (Laughing) Your sister is utterly scandalized that I let a man touch the hem of my dress when it became tangled on a walkway. If the sight of my shoes is the most scandalous moment of the festival, I shall certainly have to try harder."

(NIETZSCHE takes another letter and reads to himself.)

ELISABETH

"Friedrich, Lou Salomé is nothing more than a hussy. She speaks openly of her living arrangements with you and Paul Reé and has shown everyone a picture of her in a cart holding a whip, while you and Paul position yourself as her horses. The two of you -- or should I say three of you -- have sullied the good name of the Nietzsches. How am I ever expected to find a husband?"

(NIETZSCHE reads another letter from LOU.)

LOU

(Amused.) "Darling, I rode in a carriage with Herr Bernhard Förster, a schoolmaster. Your sister fancies him, and she is a rainbow of jealousy that I sat in an enclosed space with the man."

(ELISABETH looks bedraggled and spent. NIETZSCHE exits.)

LOU (Continued)

Frauline Nietzsche, shall we venture to Tautenburg?

ELISABETH

Surely not. You must be ill.

LOU

Why is that?

ELISABETH

Can you really expect me to go on holiday with you to Tautenburg?

LOU

But our Friedrich awaits our arrival.

ELISABETH

Our Friedrich? Our? He's my brother. He shall always be *my* Friedrich. You are simply a passing fancy.

LOU

Friedrich and I are quite clear about our relationship. Perhaps you should examine yours. See you in Tautenberg. Or not.

(ELISABETH is furious -- she exits. LOU pulls out a journal and a pen, writes and speaks aloud to the audience.)

LOU (Continued)

(To audience) Now then. Where was I? Ah, yes. Nietzsche achieved precisely the opposite of his goal: not a higher unity of his own being but its innermost division, not the fusion of all stirrings and drives, but a split and divided self. And yet, health was gained by means of sickness; true worship by means of illusion; and, self-assertion and uplifting by means of self-wounding.

(Enter NIETZSCHE.)

NIETZSCHE

(Addressing audience, LOU watches him.) Being a free spirit means you are free to find your own meaning in life or declare that there is none. This is why people created religion: because they want answers. We invented God to create certainty. Nothing more. If you fancy certainty, become a god yourself -- a god of your own life. But beware: it is not doubt which drives us mad, but certainty.

LOU

People are terrified of your claims.

NIETZSCHE

When you learn that there is no ghost in the air directing you to be good, it makes one uneasy, sick in the soul. But that sickness can be overcome. Spirits should soar, despite the cost of melting wax.

LOU

Wings should be made of sterner stuff.

NIETZSCHE

Everyone who has ever and anywhere built a 'new heaven' first had to find the power to do so in his own hell.

LOU

(To audience) His philosophy is his unconscious memoir.

NIETZSCHE

I ask you: Should the aim of science be to give men as much pleasure and as little displeasure as possible? But what if pleasure and displeasure were so tied together that whoever wanted to have as much as possible of one must also have as much as possible of the other? -- that whoever wanted to learn to 'jubilate up to the heavens' would also have to be prepared for 'depression unto death'?

LOU

(To audience) He has always been searching for a replacement for God, where none exists.

(LOU turns and addresses NIETZSCHE.)

LOU (Continued)

This is the tragic conflict of your life, Friedrich. The conflict between the need for God and the compulsive need to deny God. Religion dominates your thinking, always.

NIETZSCHE

What has religion done for the world?

LOU

Alright. I'll play Devil's advocate. It has built buildings, inspired art, created codes to live by, made people strive to be moral.

NIETZSCHE

Ah yes. Morality. My dear Lou, it is the conscientious, and not the unscrupulous, who have suffered so greatly from encouragement of penitence and the fear of hell, especially if they happened to have an imagination. A gloom has been cast over the lives of those who had the greatest need of cheerfulness and agreeable images -- not only for the sake of their own consolation and recovery from themselves, but that humanity itself might take delight in them and absorb a ray of their beauty.

(Enter ELISABETH. Lou writes in her notebook for the next three lines.)

ELISABETH

(Just to Nietzsche) Your friend is a snake, Friedrich.

NIETZSCHE

A snake is a powerful metaphor, sister. A snake that cannot shed its skin will die. It is the same with minds which cannot change their opinions.

ELISABETH

(To NIETZSCHE) Your "friend" flirts with anything in a suit. Can you not tell her to let Bernhard alone?

(Exit LOU.)

NIETZSCHE

Llama, you must know that Lou has no intentions toward Bernhard. She won't marry anyone -- not even me.

ELISABETH

(Implying Lou is a whore) She's the kind of girl who *doesn't need to marry*.

NIETZSCHE

Oh how I *wish* you were right.

ELISABETH

Friedrich!

NIETZSCHE

What?

ELISABETH

Couldn't you please sympathize with me for once?

NIETZSCHE

No.

ELISABETH

You're impossible.

NIETZSCHE

It would be presumptuous of me to feel sorry for you. If I did, I would make a value judgment on your life -- one that deforms you into a creature that should be *pitied*, rather than one who has the power to decide for herself whether or not her suffering has value.

ELISABETH

My suffering is *valuable*.

NIETZSCHE

Then make meaning from it. Now. Don't you feel better?

ELISABETH

If I were a man, I would hit you.

NIETZSCHE

I am delighted you're a woman then.

ELISABETH

And alone. A woman alone -- as it seems, forever. While your whore-friend refuses to marry, I shall never even have the chance.

NIETZSCHE

Nonsense.

ELISABETH

(Like a tantrum) I'm making meaning since you will not pity me.

NIETZSCHE

If I were you, I would attempt to find a different meaning. But that's your choice, of course.

(ELISABETH holds her head in her hands, angry. Enter LOU.)

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

Ah, Lou. Are your accommodations to your liking?

LOU

Wonderful. I have everything I need. Would you care to go for a walk, Friedrich?

NIETZSCHE

Allow me to find my walking stick.

(ELISABETH angrily stomps over, grabs the walking stick and hands it to NIETZSCHE.)

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

Thank you.

ELISABETH

(Spitefully) My pleasure.

(ELISABETH exits, and NIETZSCHE and LOU link arms and start to walk the stage.)

LOU

What's wrong with your sister?

NIETZSCHE

I believe she's jealous of you.

LOU

Of me? (Mock confidence) Well, I can certainly understand that.

NIETZSCHE

Jealousy, envy -- they're terrible emotions. I understand them, but I feel we, as a species, could probably do better.

LOU

What is the cure for a jealous heart?

NIETZSCHE

That's a good question. What do you think?

LOU

Perhaps living your life to its fullest.

NIETZSCHE

But how could you counter the things you cannot control?

LOU

One must have a thick skin, accept things on a rational level.

NIETZSCHE

You sound like Paul Rée. So logical.

LOU

The Greeks and Romans appeal to us to use our rationality and logic to assuage our emotional responses.

NIETZSCHE

Don't you think there's a better way? One that allows you to use your emotions to their fullest extent?

LOU

And be miserable like your sister?

NIETZSCHE

What about a radical acceptance of one's fate -- not just shrugging and taking it, but. . . a sort of . . . *amor fati*?

LOU

(Translating) Love of fate?

NIETZSCHE

Exactly.

LOU

All right. What is the advantage to loving one's fate?

NIETZSCHE

Well. A celibate priest --

LOU

Is this about sex?

NIETZSCHE

Isn't everything? (Lou laughs) So a Roman Catholic priest takes a vow of celibacy -- something completely psychologically destructive and self-defeating.

LOU

Is this about me?

NIETZSCHE

(Intentionally repeating) Isn't everything? The only way that this sort of brutal asceticism is going to work is if the priest does not merely accept his fate, but fully embraces it with a love that would admit no other possibility to enter his mind.

LOU

So the priest must then also love his suffering.

NIETZSCHE

Love his suffering in a way that he could never wish it be gone.

LOU

I thought you were against such self-denial.

NIETZSCHE

I am. The only way it can work is through an intense love of fate, which very few people can attain. Usually, instead, they simply resent everything and everyone else.

LOU

Like your sister. She seems to have a persistent hatred toward anyone who is happy.

NIETZSCHE

I believe she feels powerless. (Lou starts to object) I did not say that she *is* powerless, but that she probably feels that way.

LOU

She doesn't have to take it out on me.

NIETZSCHE

You're a convenient target -- someone who seems to have found a way to be happy despite our society's oppressive moral code. Lots of people resent free spirits -- not just Elisabeth. Those who have the strength to make their own choices are hated by the oppressed. The oppressed then create a dichotomy of good -- themselves -- versus evil -- their oppressors.

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

Take masters and slaves. The slaves who are oppressed view the masters as evil and themselves as good. And no matter how otherwise moral the masters are, the slaves will always resent them as evil incarnate -- as the very reason for their oppression, even if the master did not buy or sell the slave. They owned them, and that was enough.

LOU

But if the slave were freed, could not the master become moral?

NIETZSCHE

Of course not. There would always be the ache of resentment in the freed slave -- for the time he was enslaved. The only way either the slave or the master would be happy is if they were to either love their fate or destroy their customs, traditions, and structures that put them in these categories.

LOU

Few have the ability to love such a terrible and disturbing fate, and even fewer want to destroy culture.

NIETZSCHE

You're thinking like a moralist. And you're proving my point. Morality is used to make the fortunate feel guilty and the unfortunate feel justified in their resentment.

LOU

Can you blame them?

NIETZSCHE

Of course not -- it's the lot that society has given them. The *society* needs to change. Otherwise, indignation is the only happiness the oppressed know.

LOU

I think your sister will always hate me.

NIETZSCHE

I like how you returned the subject to yourself. (Ironic) Philosophy is nothing if not practically applicable.

(WAGNER enters, angry.)

WAGNER

Nietzsche.

LOU

Oh dear.

NIETZSCHE

Richard.

LOU

I have work to do. If you'll excuse me.
LOU exits, looking nervously at both men.

WAGNER

You have betrayed me, Nietzsche. You have run my name through the mud.

NIETZSCHE

Have I?

WAGNER

You've come to believe there's no such thing as genius, eh? That I'm *depraved*!

NIETZSCHE

I know you believe in your own god-like status. Some of us have to work at our art.

WAGNER

Are you saying that just anyone could write like me?

NIETZSCHE

Anyone who persists at their work *will* out-write you. You don't understand that the essence of beauty comes from suffering.

WAGNER

Do you think that what I do is easy? You can't write music like me.

NIETZSCHE

I do not try as hard. Nor do I plume my tail feathers in your fashion.

WAGNER

Ah, yes, (flips through a book) as you write here, "An improvement on the Gospel of Luke 18:14, 'He that humbles himself *wishes* to be exalted.'"

NIETZSCHE

Try to argue against that point, I dare you.

WAGNER

You write against everything the culture has taught us.

NIETZSCHE

I have also argued that science takes the beauty from the world and explains what once was inexplicable. It is at once enlightening and disillusioning.

WAGNER

Don't you remember the old days? We used to say the two of us were going to recreate culture -- recreate Germany.

NIETZSCHE

I never said anything about Germany. I am not even a German citizen. I am the very definition of a free spirit -- stateless -- with no loyalties to restrain me.

WAGNER

Dear lord, Nietzsche. Do you not believe in the superiority of the Germans?

NIETZSCHE

No. Every nationalist will call their nation superior -- they can't all be right.

WAGNER

But why do you have to destroy my name, write against me, call me a decadent? You say that (reads from book) "Wagner's art is diseased."

NIETZSCHE

You wrote to my doctor and claimed my failing eyesight is due to excessive masturbation. (Wagner is stunned to silence.) Do not try to deny it.

WAGNER

It was Cosima.

NIETZSCHE

Do you really think I'd believe that your wife wrote to a doctor about my masturbation habits?

WAGNER

I have always thought of you as a son. I was concerned about you.

NIETZSCHE

Is it not bad enough that you, who were once the soul of my heart, are writing to physicians about me? You have betrayed me, and you have betrayed yourself with that disgusting Parsifal.

WAGNER

What is disgusting about Parsifal?

NIETZSCHE

You only wrote it for money. Has your gambling gotten you into trouble again? Or have your massive debts simply followed you around like dogs?

WAGNER

Unlike you, I have a family. We must have something to live on.

NIETZSCHE

You don't *believe* in what you wrote -- you sold whatever might be considered your "soul."

WAGNER

Would you rather I write about your Jewish friends? Paul Rée and Lou Salomé. If anyone is degenerate, it's you and the sordid company you keep.

NIETZSCHE

Lou isn't Jewish, but even if she were, she lives a less compromised life than you do.

WAGNER

But you admit that Rée is an Israelite.

NIETZSCHE

Yes, and I quite admire him -- and the Jews. Think -- how much must these people have suffered in order to become so beautiful! You don't live millenia under the whip of one master or another without learning how to make meaning of your suffering. They are better men than you.

(WAGNER, enraged, spits at NIETZSCHE.)

WAGNER

You have lost one father. I suppose losing another will mean nothing to you.

(WAGNER exits. NIETZSCHE holds his head in his hands, as if his head is about to explode. He closes his eyes and tries deep breathing for a few breaths, but it doesn't help.)

NIETZSCHE

(Quietly) Elisabeth?

(NIETZSCHE writhes in pain, clutching his head. Enter ELISABETH.)

ELISABETH

Have you called for God's help, Friedrich? See if he has not abandoned you.

(NIETZSCHE looks at her wide eyed.)

NIETZSCHE

Help. Please.

ELISABETH

When have you helped me?

NIETZSCHE

Please.

(ELISABETH sighs and goes to him, holding her hand against his forehead, as if to check his temperature.)

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

(Whimpers) Llama.

ELISABETH

Behold the man! You are nothing without me.

(NIETZSCHE's body shakes with tremors, as his headache increases in pain.)

He shuts his eyes, whimpering. Then, he opens his eyes enough to find his way to his sick chair, sits.)

ELISABETH (Continued)

Thirty-two years after Friedrich died, the party sent a man to the archives to see what I had collected.

(Enter NAZI.)

NAZI

We are very interested in Herr Nietzsche's theory of the übermensch.

ELISABETH

Yes, the übermensch is a man of a superior race.

NIETZSCHE

(To the audience, unheard by Elisabeth and Nazi) The übermensch is a man of the future -- one who sets his own values instead of being caged by society. He is superior in that he does not allow himself to be controlled. He is the opposite of a Nazi.

NAZI

We have come to believe that German power can best be consolidated with appropriate breeding -- excluding those who are outsiders.

ELISABETH

Like?

NAZI

Gypsies, Jews. Your brother did not favor Jews did he?

ELISABETH

No, of course not.

NAZI

Racial purity must be attained for the future progress of the nation.

ELISABETH

However I can help you, I will.

NAZI

Tell me about your brother.

ELISABETH

As you shall see in the archive, he was a great man. He was rather ill the last years of his life -- for eleven years he suffered until he finally died in August of 1900.

NAZI

So long ago.

ELISABETH

He could have been a great help to the party's cause.

NAZI

Well -- so he shall be.

ELISABETH

His writings shall provide whatever you need. I shall make certain of it.

(ELISABETH escorts NAZI to the exit, and NAZI exits. ELISABETH returns to NIETZSCHE who sits in his sick chair. She takes a pillow.)

ELISABETH (Continued)

I'm doing this for you, Friedrich.

(ELISABETH takes a pillow from behind NIETZSCHE'S head and smothers him with it until he's dead. A pause, then ELISABETH stands aside, and watches NIETZSCHE. NIETZSCHE revives and sits at the table, writing. He looks up at the audience.)

NIETZSCHE

(To audience) In 1885, I was not yet insane or murdered or a tool for the Nazis.

ELISABETH

What are you working on?

NIETZSCHE

Everything and nothing.

ELISABETH

Do you mind cleaning up when you're finished?

NIETZSCHE

Me? Finished. Never.

ELISABETH

Do you ever wonder how our lives would have been different if our father had lived?

NIETZSCHE

I suppose.

ELISABETH

It's entirely possible that you would have followed in his footsteps.

NIETZSCHE

Me? A minister?

ELISABETH

It's not too late, Friedrich. I shall pray for you. Perhaps you may have a change of heart.

NIETZSCHE

It would take a miracle. But the only constant is change, and I have certainly changed -- or perhaps, evolved.

ELISABETH

I don't like that scientific language. It's indecent.

NIETZSCHE

Darwin is indecent?

ELISABETH

I certainly did not evolve from apes.

NIETZSCHE

You prefer that humans proliferated by incest?

ELISABETH

God's will is not incestuous.

NIETZSCHE

You would have been better off if father had survived. The two of you could wax poetic about God.

ELISABETH

I cannot but hope you will return to Christ, brother.

NIETZSCHE

I believe you have a tedious wait ahead of you.

ELISABETH

Bernhard Forster is coming to dinner tonight.

NIETZSCHE

(Irritated, to himself) That anti-semitic, nationalist? (To Elisabeth) I suppose Lou hasn't stolen him from you after all.

ELISABETH

Do not mention her tonight.

NIETZSCHE

Whatever you say, llama.

ELISABETH

Thank you. And please be nice to him. You have something in common -- he would like to remake Germany, just like you.

NIETZSCHE

Don't confuse me with Wagner. All I've wanted is cultural reform and artistic expansion. Bernhard simply wants to eliminate Jews.

ELISABETH

Through Bernhard, we shall define the übermensch as the pure Aryan.

NIETZSCHE

(Laughs) You don't even know what these words mean. The superior man is not Aryan nor religious; he is concerned with life on earth and the immediate present. And he certainly doesn't want to eliminate Jews.

ELISABETH

Jews make the immediate present worse than it could be.

NIETZSCHE

Was not your Jesus a Jew?

ELISABETH

No! He was Christian.

NIETZSCHE

(Shakes his head in disbelief) You are giving me a headache.

(Nietzsche really starts to get sick, taking his head in his hands as if in great pain. This time, he falls from the chair, into a fetal position, holding his head.)

ELISABETH

Friedrich! I'll get a doctor.

(ELISABETH exits in haste. NIETZSCHE gets up, painfully, and brushes himself off.)

NIETZSCHE

(To audience) Elisabeth married Bernhard, and they left for Paraguay to start a German colony, free from their hated Jews. When it failed, Bernhard killed himself with cyanide.

(Enter ELISABETH.)

ELISABETH

It was a heart attack.

NIETZSCHE

(To audience) A bad conscience is easier to cope with than a bad reputation.

ELISABETH

The doctor gave me this powder for your pain. I'll mix it with some tea.

(Exit ELISABETH. NIETZSCHE sits at the table to write. LOU enters, writing in her notebook.)

LOU

(Reading aloud as she writes) Nietzsche was an egoist whose self-love made for a strange apostle of his own philosophy.

(LOU exits. NIETZSCHE looks up from his writing, watching her go. ELISABETH enters.)

NIETZSCHE

Llama.

ELISABETH

What's wrong?

NIETZSCHE

I'm contemplating suicide.

ELISABETH

Whatever for?

NIETZSCHE

Lou and Paul ran off together. I have no idea where they went. They haven't written to me. They left no return address.

ELISABETH

Don't kill yourself over that whore, Lou Salomé. If she remains in Germany, I will do whatever it takes to have her deported.

NIETZSCHE

(Scoffs) Whatever could she be deported for?

ELISABETH

I could write to the authorities and tell them she's an immoral personage.

NIETZSCHE

As if *I* could complain about an immoral personage.

ELISABETH

I will start this very instant. I have much to say about that scandalous woman.

NIETZSCHE

Do whatever you like. Meanwhile, I'm going to fill a prescription for opium and sleep for a year.

ELISABETH

You will do no such thing.

NIETZSCHE

You can order anything you like as long as you put "doctor" in front of your name.

ELISABETH

You're not *that* kind of doctor.

NIETZSCHE

They never ask.

ELISABETH

Friedrich, don't you think a change of scenery would do you some good? Why don't we go to Rome for a little while. You can take your walks through the hills.

NIETZSCHE

Please. And watch the faithful grovel their way up the steps of St. Peters on their knees?

ELISABETH

It wouldn't kill you to do some self-reflection within the sight of a church.

NIETZSCHE

(Resigned) Fine. Bring the Antichrist to Rome. We'll see if lightning strikes.

(NIETZSCHE takes his walking stick and they walk around the stage.)

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

I've started writing a new book.

ELISABETH

Really?

NIETZSCHE

It's almost an attempt to become Wagner's heir. Operatic and musical in a sense. It's different from my other books. More like a set of poetic parables than brief essays and aphorisms.

ELISABETH

What is your aim in writing it?

NIETZSCHE

I thought I might try to be literary. Create a new sort of spirituality. It will utterly baffle my critics.

ELISABETH

You'll have to remain sober in order to work on it.

NIETZSCHE

Then I'd better work fast.

(ELISABETH exits. NIETZSCHE walks center with his walking stick, contemplating the wood and its design. NIETZSCHE looks at the stick as he speaks the following from Thus Spoke Zarathustra.)

NIETZSCHE

Once upon a time there was a tree. Even if a man wanted to bend the tree to his will, he couldn't. Yet the wind bent it and shaped it with its invisible hands. And the tree grew -- and the higher it climbed, the more the roots dug into the earth in search of evil. The tree limbs, high above, looked all around, and the tree said, "I no longer trust myself, now that I've climbed so high." The height of the branches made the tree utterly, totally alone, until he became tired of the height. And so near the clouds, he could only wait for lightning to come and destroy him. And yet, he heard a whisper, "Do not cast out the hero in thy soul." All whose eyes are on the afterlife are simply waiting to die. They do not truly live. Thus spoke Zarathustra.

(NIETZSCHE sets the walking stick aside, and sits at the table to write. A pause, then ELISABETH enters, carrying a newspaper.)

ELISABETH

(Holds out the newspaper to NIETZSCHE) Friedrich.

NIETZSCHE

What is it? I'm working.

ELISABETH

I'm sorry to interrupt. I think you should read this.

NIETZSCHE

Is it Lou?

ELISABETH

No. Just -- just read it.

NIETZSCHE

(Reads aloud) February 14th, 1883, "The intelligence of Richard Wagner's sudden death -- (Pauses, upset. Starts again.) The intelligence of Richard Wagner's sudden death painfully surprised and shocked our musical circles. Though it was scarcely to be expected that, in the course of nature, a man of seventy would extend the proud series of his works and raise his fame still higher than it was -- the disappearance of so unusual an individual is, and will be, a heavy loss."

(WAGNER enters and stands, waiting.)

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

I believe Wagner died just as I began writing my Zarathustra.

WAGNER

Remember 1876? Friedrich, the theatre at Bayreuth is complete, and at last my Ring cycle will be performed at the Festspielhaus. I cannot wait to see your reaction to it.

NIETZSCHE

(Subdued -- Friedrich is still in the present, remembering) I'm glad for you, my friend. I anticipate a rousing success. (To the audience) And a very sore bottom.

WAGNER

Rehearsals have been ongoing for weeks. Of all the men I wish to impress, you are foremost in my mind.

ELISABETH

When did you two first meet?

(Enter MAN.)

NIETZSCHE

1868: I was in Leipzig, a student and twenty-four years old. A man told me --

MAN

Richard Wagner is in town, staying just across the way. If you'd like to meet him, I could inquire for you.

WAGNER

I invited him to Sunday dinner.

NIETZSCHE

I felt I had to wear something impressive. I hired a tailor to make me a new suit.

MAN

I have your new clothes, Herr Nietzsche.

WAGNER

And you refused to pay his assistant when he arrived with the pants.

NIETZSCHE

(To Man) Why are you asking for more than I was told? I must speak to your master.

MAN

It costs what it costs, Herr Nietzsche.

NIETZSCHE

I believe you're trying to make a fool of me.

MAN

Why on earth would I do that?

NIETZSCHE

I'm only paying what I was told it would cost.

MAN

How am I to know what you were told? *I was told* this is what you owed. Of course, if you do not want the suit, I can always return it to the shop.

NIETZSCHE

And he started to take away my new clothes.

WAGNER

You struggled and swore revenge.

NIETZSCHE

No! You'll lose your job for this -- I'll see to it. I can't wear velvet to meet a genius.

MAN

As far as I'm concerned, you can go in your underwear. And good luck to you.

(Exit Man.)

NIETZSCHE

I had no dinner jacket.

WAGNER

You needed none. After all, when a son meets his father for the first time, he is a naked, vulnerable babe.

NIETZSCHE

(To audience) Meeting Wagner was when I took the first deep breath of my life.

ELISABETH

I do believe he loved you, brother.

NIETZSCHE

(To Wagner) Were you pained when we parted ways?

WAGNER

(Tenderly) What do you think?

NIETZSCHE

I have struggled to love my fate -- the fate of loss.

WAGNER

The more we love, the more can be taken away.

NIETZSCHE

Sons often break from their fathers in light of their differences and never return to them. A clash of swords may never be seen, but it is deeply felt.

WAGNER

I come to seek forgiveness.

NIETZSCHE

(To the audience) This is the dream I started having in 1883 -- that my adopted father, Wagner, returns to me, a better man, and I, a better son, can look past his flaws, knowing that his generation simply was not enlightened about certain things. And were incapable of enlightenment.

WAGNER

And yet. . .

NIETZSCHE

And yet, there are some things that are unforgivable.

WAGNER

I cannot control how my legacy was written.

NIETZSCHE

Nor can I. But you actually *believed* in the new German empire -- I, on the other hand, am the most anti-political man alive.

WAGNER

You believed in the übermensch.

NIETZSCHE

I didn't want to kill people.

WAGNER

Must we harp on that?

NIETZSCHE

I have stood at the threshold of death too many times to wish it upon another soul.

WAGNER

Friedrich. . .

NIETZSCHE

History will link our names to each other for all time, Richard. And that is why I must never stop writing about you -- to make clear that we are not on the same side.

WAGNER

You may hate me, you may love me, you may stone me in your works. All I know is that I'll never be forgotten.

(WAGNER exits.)

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

Thus, as my father died, my son Zarathustra was born. But Richard was right. I would not forget him.

(NIETZSCHE sits in his sick chair, catatonic. ELISABETH goes to the table and starts sorting through papers.
Enter LOU.)

ELISABETH turns and sees her. NIETZSCHE is invisible to them both.)

ELISABETH (Continued)

Here you are again. Have you come to congratulate me on my marriage to Bernhard? He obviously was immune to your charms.

LOU

(Unenthusiastic) Congratulations. I hear you're packing off to Paraguay.

ELISABETH

Yes. Bernhard is eager to start our colonization efforts.

LOU

How is Fredrich?

ELISABETH

Does he know you're here?

LOU

No, we haven't spoken in at least two years.

ELISABETH

Hm. What have you been doing all that time? I'm sure Friedrich has written to you.

LOU

He slowly stopped.

ELISABETH

Well, I'm afraid you came to the wrong person to reconcile the two of you.

LOU

I miss him.

ELISABETH

As far as I'm concerned, you running off with Paul Rée was the best thing that ever happened to my brother.

LOU

Then, I suppose you wouldn't be willing to do me a favor.

ELISABETH

Why on earth would I help you?

LOU

I've written a book. My first book ever. It's called *Struggling for God*.

ELISABETH

(Sarcastic) Are you a philosopher now, too?

LOU

Well, it's more of an autobiographical Roman à clef. I wanted to send a copy to Friedrich, but I didn't know where he was living. I thought I'd bring a copy to you before you left Europe.

ELISABETH

I'm not interested in your work, thank you.

LOU

I'm asking that you forward it to Friedrich. If it comes from me, I'm not sure that he'll read it.

ELISABETH

He should be more selective with his reading. His eyes are terrible these days.

LOU

Worse than before?

ELISABETH

Sight doesn't *improve* over time.

LOU

Of course, the way we see things evolves.

ELISABETH

You writers and your metaphors.

(LOU gestures to a pen on the table.)

LOU

Do you know why we call a pen a pen?

ELISABETH

Dear God. Can you leave?

LOU

Penna is Latin for feather. Friedrich taught me that.
He used to say:

NIETZSCHE

Writing is the only method of flight that humans have.

ELISABETH

Charming.

LOU

Are you this cold to your husband?

ELISABETH

My husband doesn't annoy me as you do.

LOU

Lovely. Give Friedrich the book.

(LOU puts the book on the table and
exits. ELISABETH picks it up and pages
through it.)

NIETZSCHE

(To audience) In ancient times, words were carved into
stone. There was an urgent need to make them
permanent, never let thought slide into oblivion. We
stopped writing in stone and our legacy has become
less about permanence and more about control. We are
no longer slaves to eternity and tradition. We simply
destroy whatever it is we disagree with.

ELISABETH

(Puts book down. To NIETZSCHE) There's a book for you
on the table.

(ELISABETH exits. NIETZSCHE stands,
comes to the table, takes the book and
opens to read the title page.)

NIETZSCHE

Struggling for God by Lou Salomé.

(NIETZSCHE turns a page, and reads:)

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

"Friedrich -- in these pages I took revenge on myself
on your behalf. Yours, Lou."

(NIETZSCHE closes the book, kisses the front cover.)

NIETZSCHE

Even the rudest words, the rudest letters, are still more benign than silence.

(Enter DOCTOR.)

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

Doctor. How is 1885 treating you?

DOCTOR

Quite well, Herr Professor, how are you today?

NIETZSCHE

Heartbroken, as usual. But I'm surviving.

DOCTOR

I must confess I did not understand a word of your *Zarathustra*.

NIETZSCHE

If you could understand just *pieces* of it, you would be the paragon of modern man.

DOCTOR

In lieu of that, let's get a good look at you.

(DOCTOR starts to examine NIETZSCHE, listening to his heart and lungs, and then moving to his eyes.)

NIETZSCHE

Ah, yes. I am one thing, and my writings are another.

DOCTOR

Has the gonorrhoea cleared?

NIETZSCHE

I took the arsenic for it. There's not much pain, now.

DOCTOR

I can provide another prescription.

NIETZSCHE

Perhaps.

DOCTOR

If you have no pain, you need not take it.

NIETZSCHE

Thank you.

DOCTOR

I'll give you some eye drops. Gonorrhoea is hell on the eyes. But truly, Herr Professor, the best thing that could be done for your eyes would be not to strain them.

NIETZSCHE

And how would I do that?

DOCTOR

You should avoid reading and writing as much as possible.

NIETZSCHE

(Laughs, then) Oh, you're serious?

DOCTOR

Especially when there is less light -- at night, by the fireside.

NIETZSCHE

You must understand, I could never set aside reading and writing. I'm . . . I'm a philosopher.

DOCTOR

Perhaps you could hire someone to read to you and take dictation.

NIETZSCHE

I don't know.

DOCTOR

I understand it must pain you to hear my recommendation, but you must ask yourself whether you'd rather live a life with chronic pain, or try to mitigate it.

NIETZSCHE

(Mulls this over a moment, upset) Thank you, Doctor.

DOCTOR

Fate is a fickle thing. (Joking) If it would keep you from the brothel, I'd prescribe marriage.

NIETZSCHE

I'd wager that marriage doesn't always cure one's natural instincts.

DOCTOR

True. But it *mostly* doesn't come with gonorrhoea. If you do marry, make sure you clear yours up first.

NIETZSCHE

Right.

DOCTOR

I shall have my assistant bring you drops and another prescription. Keep me informed of your progress.

(Exit DOCTOR. NIETZSCHE breathes deeply.)

NIETZSCHE

(To audience) I should give great thanks to this illness. Every moment without it gives cause for incredible joy.

(NIETZSCHE goes to his sick chair, catatonic again. In his madness, NIETZSCHE hallucinates the following. Enter ELISABETH and LOU, unaware of each other's presence.)

LOU

Friedrich? Where are you?

ELISABETH

(As if a young child, playing hide and seek) I'm going to count to ten.

LOU

Don't hide from me. We need to climb down the hillside. It's going to be dark soon.

ELISABETH

One, two, three --

LOU

Friedrich? This isn't funny.

ELISABETH

Four, five, six --

LOU

What are you waiting for?

ELISABETH

Seven, eight, nine --

LOU

Friedrich Nietzsche!

ELISABETH

Ten! Ready or not, here I come.

(ELISABETH starts searching the room,
like a kid playing Hide-and-Seek. LOU
looks around, too.)

LOU

Hello? Is anyone there?

ELISABETH

(Sing-songy) I'm coming to get you.

LOU

Friedrich? (Determined) I'm coming to get you.

ELISABETH

I'm gonna get you.

LOU

I'll find you.

ELISABETH

Friedrich?

LOU

Friedrich?

ELISABETH

(Sing-songy) Brother.

(LOU comes to NIETZSCHE's side.)

LOU

Oh there you are. You frightened me so.

(NIETZSCHE stands and looks at her.)

NIETZSCHE

Where is my walking stick?

(LOU finds the stick and gives it to
him.)

LOU

Here. Where you left it.

NIETZSCHE

We can't stay here. It's getting dark.

LOU

That's precisely what I said.

ELISABETH

Ready or not, here I come.

NIETZSCHE

Do you ever feel like you're reliving every moment all at once?

LOU

I don't know. This does seem familiar.

NIETZSCHE

How well do you know me?

LOU

Very well, I think. As well as two bosom friends could know each other.

NIETZSCHE

I've gone away.

LOU

No, I just found you.

ELISABETH

Father is gone forever, Friedrich. You must be my father now.

NIETZSCHE

Can you hear that?

LOU

What?

NIETZSCHE

My sister's voice.

LOU

No.

ELISABETH

You must give me permission to marry Bernhard,
Friedrich.

NIETZSCHE

No.

LOU

What is it?

NIETZSCHE

NO. We need to get out of here.

ELISABETH

You will be sorry if you don't.

NIETZSCHE

I will be sorry either way.

LOU

What are you talking about? Friedrich?

ELISABETH

Friedrich?

LOU

Friedrich?

(NIETZSCHE retreats to his sick chair
and sits, rocking himself back and
forth, holding his head.)

NIETZSCHE

(Yelling) NO!

(The hallucination fades and LOU exits,
leaving ELISABETH and NIETZSCHE on
stage.)

NIETZSCHE (Continued)

(Normal volume, but shaky voice) I am one thing, my
writings are another. They are not understood, nor am
I.

(Enter HITLER. He circumnavigates
NIETZSCHE'S sick chair, and looks
around the room, taking it all in.)

ELISABETH

Heil Hitler.

HITLER

Frau Förster-Nietzsche, the archive of your brother's work is most impressive indeed.

ELISABETH

Mein Führer, I am so pleased that you like it.

HITLER

As you know, we are interested in all ways to reach the German people with our mission. We will use the arts to consolidate our message into a united front.

ELISABETH

We must save our traditions, bolster our values.

HITLER

Yes. It is necessary to meet the Judeo-Bolshevik threat before it permanently infringes upon our culture.

ELISABETH

I couldn't agree more.

HITLER

The purification of our culture must be a priority. We cannot abide any infringement of German supremacy.

ELISABETH

My brother loved tales of those who struggle. Indeed, one of his great complaints was how degenerate we have become with our lack of noble deeds.

HITLER

Had he ever fought in a war?

ELISABETH

Yes, he was wounded in the chest as a young man, well before he became a philosopher.

HITLER

Fascinating.

ELISABETH

I am so proud to be his sister.

HITLER

Your work for the party -- has been greatly appreciated.

ELISABETH

Anything for the cause.

HITLER

When did your brother pass away?

ELISABETH

Nearly thirty-five years ago. I was at his side when he died.

(ELISABETH and NIETZSCHE lock eyes for a moment.)

HITLER

Had he been ill?

ELISABETH

Yes. His death was a mercy.

HITLER

We shall issue his works to every enlisted soldier.

ELISABETH

Oh, what an honor.

HITLER

Which text do you think best to distribute to them?

ELISABETH

Well, I know his own favorite was *Zarathustra*. . .

HITLER

Then, *Zarathustra* it shall be.

ELISABETH

Thank you.

(ELISABETH, overwhelmed with pride and bursting with national enthusiasm, looks around the room for an appropriate token of her thanks.)

ELISABETH (Continued)

Mein Führer, I wondered if I might give you a gift.

(ELISABETH crosses and pick up NIETZSCHE'S walking stick.)

NIETZSCHE

No.

ELISABETH

I would love for you to have my brother's walking stick.

NIETZSCHE

(To audience) This is a true story.

ELISABETH

He took it with him everywhere he went.

(HITLER takes the walking stick and tries it out.)

HITLER

Many thanks, Frau Förster-Nietzsche. I shall carry it with great pleasure.

ELISABETH

I'm so pleased.

(ELIZABETH and HITLER link arms and exit together. Enter LOU. She goes to NIETZSCHE'S side. He is catatonic again.)

LOU

Friedrich, I brought you a copy of my new book. *Nietzsche in His Works*.

(NIETZSCHE does not answer. She opens the book towards the end.)

LOU (Continued)

(To the audience, reading from the book) Nietzsche knew that he was going under, and yet with a laughing mouth and rose-wreath crowned, he parted from life, absolving and justifying and transfiguring it.

(LOU stands, kisses his head, and exits. NIETZSCHE stands and looks at the audience.)

NIETZSCHE

"To redeem the past and to transform every 'It was' into an 'I wanted it thus!' -- that alone do I call redemption!"

END OF PLAY.

