

# **MINISTER'S CHILD**

A Musical by Chris Guin

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*We Americans are dancing  
on the edge of the abyss,  
happily unaware of the implications  
of the murder of God.  
At least Nietzsche had the  
intellectual integrity  
to go insane.*

## Cast of Characters

Old Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche

Ernst, *the biographer*

Young Fritz Nietzsche

Ludwig Nietzsche, his father

Franziska Nietzsche, his mother

Little Girl Elisabeth Nietzsche, *his sister*

Nietzsche's Grandmother and Aunts

Friedrich Nietzsche

Richard Wagner

Army Sergeant

Cosima Wagner

Young Elisabeth Nietzsche

Bernhard Förster

Zarathustra, a character created by Nietzsche

Turin Man

Various Townsfolk, Soldiers, elite German citizens, etc.

(Underlined parts have major singing roles)

### MAJOR MUSICAL NUMBERS

"Little Minister's Child"

"Hymn/Least Among Us"

"A Mother's Love"

"Don't Mess with the Women"

"The Spirit of Germany"

"Will-to-Power"

"Fly Home, Mama Bird"

"Power of the Heart"

"Dance of the Social Ladder"

"Least Among Us / Song of Zarathustra"

"God is Dead"

"The Letter Song"

"Castletown Streets"

"A Mother's Love (Reprise)"

"Fall of God"

"Requiem for an Age"

## ACT ONE

### “Overture” (Track 1)

*The Nietzsche Archive, sometime in the 1930's. The room is large and spacious, its far reaches engulfed in almost complete shadow. It is eerily dark, and everything in the room gives the impression of dusty age. The walls of the room are cluttered with various artifacts: furniture, bookcases, piles of old manuscripts. Some things are covered in sheets. The old, decayed look of the place contrasts sharply with its apparent luxury. There are elegant sconces posted around the wall. The curtains covering the windows along the back wall are thick and give the impression of decadent wealth. There is a table in the lower right corner of the room with a radio upon it, and a number of doors leading out of the room.*

Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche sits in her wheelchair in the lower right corner of the room, by the radio. The curtains are pulled and what little light there is in the room comes from the sconces, which are set to be as dim as possible. Elisabeth herself is old and decrepit. She sits hunched in the wheelchair, wrapped in blankets. A cane rests against the wheelchair. In the darkness, it is difficult to make out the features of her face. The radio is on. Nazi propaganda plays through static. We hear the voice of the Fuhrer ringing over the radio address, intermingling with electronic hissing. The speech transforms into wild applause, fading even further in and out of the static until finally all that remains is a soft, droning noise, and then, nothing at all.

A door opens and the female attendant steps in, accompanied by Ernst, a Nazi author. He is dressed in a gray suit and carries paper and pen for taking notes. He follows closely behind the attendant as they walk in, eyeing the forbidding surroundings and throwing occasional scared glances at the figure in the wheelchair in the center of the room, for whom he has an obvious amount of fear. The attendant approaches her warily.

FEMALE ATTENDANT

Frau Förster-Nietzsche?

She twists her neck to look at her, her face frozen solid.

FEMALE ATTENDANT

(slowly and in a highly condescending tone)

Frau Förster-Nietzsche, there's someone who wants to talk to you about your brother. His name is Ernst. He's going to write a book about your brother, and he wants to talk to you.

ERNST

(nodding)

How do you do, Frau Förster-Nietzsche?

Elisabeth turns her neck again to examine the newcomer. She wrinkles up her forehead.

ELISABETH  
(croaking feebly)

A handsome young man. Isn't he smart-looking?

ERNST

I've come to interview you, for a biography on your late brother.

ELISABETH

Well, then, come.... sit... make yourself comfortable in the dark with me...

Ernst looks around uncomfortably, but sees nothing upon which to sit.

ERNST

I apologize, but there doesn't seem to be a chair for me to sit in...

ELISABETH

Sit anyway.

FEMALE ATTENDANT

Perhaps you would like for me to-

ELISABETH  
(snapping)

Shut up.

FEMALE ATTENDANT

I only meant to-

ELISABETH

I said shut up. Go away. I don't like you. And bring me some tea... no... don't bring anything.

FEMALE ATTENDANT

Yes, of course.

She bows politely and exits, leaving Ernst alone with the horrible old woman. He looks around uncomfortably for a moment before finally sitting down on the floor at her feet.

ELISABETH

So, handsome young man... how do you feel to be in the presence of a *great woman*?

ERNST

(uncomfortably)

I must say... it's rather not what I expected.

ELISABETH

I am the greatest woman in all of Germany. The Mother of the Fatherland, they call me. Did you know they call me that? They say my brother was the greatest thinker of all time, but I made him great. His successes were my victories. I am here in victory. A great woman. Yes, a great woman. You are very lucky that I have granted you this audience.

ERNST

(half-ignoring her)

My purpose, Frau Förster-Nietzsche, is to determine the source of and plot the development of this man's greatness. I've read many of his works – they are... I find them exhilarating. His writing is so clear and so uninhibited. Forceful. He has a way of saying things... everything makes sense. How- how did such a man come to be?

ELISABETH

Why, because he had a great sister.

ERNST

Must you keep it so dark in here? It's—I find it difficult to read what I'm writing.

ELISABETH

I like it dark. You know I've met the Fuhrer personally? Hm? He's visited here... yes, gape in astonishment... many times. We've become friends, Herr Ernst. A wonderful person, he is... if you know him as well as I. And this—(she indicates the Archive with a sweeping gesture)—this is *my* creation. An Archive. I had all these things collected... all of the great men have been here. They kissed my hand.

ERNST

(trying to get on task)

Frau Förster-Nietzsche, if you please... would you tell me... what was this man like as a child? What was Nietzsche like? Did you know at the time what would become of him?

ELISABETH

(wrinkles her forehead and stares off into the distance, pausing for a moment)

I loved my older brother... more than you can know. He was my hero. Although... I... (she seems to change demeanor, becoming less rigid and icy) he was something of a loner. He never had any real friends. I guess... *thinking* does that to you.

As she describes her brother as a child, young Fritz walks into the archive, one hand thrust into his pocket, the other carrying a rather large, forbidding tome. He meanders a

bit, looking up at the corners of the room on occasion. He is dark-haired, and his face conveys the impression that he is constantly in deep thought. He is dressed in his Sunday clothes. When he reaches the middle of the room he plops down and begins to read. Soft yellow lights illuminate the area around him, mingled with shadows to suggest sunlight filtered through a canopy of trees.

ELISABETH

His full name was Friedrich Wilhelm... after the Emperor... but we called him Fritz, and mother called him Fritzschen. He was small for his age... very shy, and very gentle. His mind surpassed all his peers... so much so that when he was with them he had very little to talk about. The other children would play... Fritz would read. People would call him the Little Minister... our father was a minister, you know. Fritz was so quiet and—studious. I looked up to him. We were so very young... and he was so very different. How things changed...

**“Little Minister’s Child”**

ELISABETH

*Keep to yourself, little minister’s child  
Laughter was not made for you  
You weren’t ever young, little minister’s child  
Playing, smiling’s what children do.*

*Walk off the path, little minister’s child  
Don’t give into their demands.  
Keep to yourself, little minister’s child  
For nobody else understands.*

*Children don’t question,  
They only believe.  
For peace never questions  
And those who ask come to grieve.*

*Don’t fear to ask, little minister’s child  
Follow the course of your mind.  
Play in the woods, little minister’s child  
And leave that little church far behind.*

We hear the echoing laughter of children. Fritz lifts his eyes from the book and looks toward the source of the sound, longingly for a moment, before returning to the book.

ELISABETH

*Shy, gentle schoolboy  
That’s already grown  
The others are playing*

*And you've been left all alone.*

Franzizka, Fritz's mother, enters. As Elisabeth sings, she harmonizes with her, beckoning her little Fritzschen to come to her. He does, and hugs her tightly around her legs.

ELISABETH AND FRANZIZKA

*Mother is here, little minister's child.  
Hide in the folds of her dress.  
Keep to yourself, little minister's child  
Accept her loving, gentle caress.*

She takes her little son's hand and together they walk off. The lights fade to black behind them, save for a dim light around Elisabeth and Ernst.

ELISABETH

He was alone so much of the time... there's something terrible in understanding so much at such a young age. I would watch him, sometimes, while he was reading or pacing... and I would wonder what was going behind those big, brown, penetrating eyes. (she sighs) Everything changed. *He* changed. And at the time I didn't like it, I didn't like it at all, although I realize now that it had to be. We were raised in the church, like good little Lutheran children. But there were absurdities there. It was all so very... dour. Always the same. My father had his sermons... (reaches for a notebook of old, yellowed papers and hands it to Ernst)... you can see them for yourself. There was this one... I remember... and we always sang this hymn...

As she says this, the candlelight procession enters the Archive. Two lines of worshippers, each carrying a candle, enter, one from each side. All that can be seen at first are the candles. Slowly, lights suggestive of stained glass illuminate the procession as they march in, singing the hymn. The light is fractured and at an odd angle. As they sing, they file into rows as if at pews, facing upstage, with an aisle down the middle so that an old podium can be seen. Ludwig, Nietzsche's father and the Lutheran minister, presides at the podium. Franzizka, young Fritz, and little Elisabeth are all present in the procession.

**“Hymn”** (Track 3)

WOMEN CHURCHGOERS

*Dear Lord, redeem us  
We know how we sin  
Lord, let Thy mercy in.*

*We know we are hopeless  
Without Thee above  
Shower us with Thy love.*

MEN

*Lord, we try  
We're good people  
We'll worship Thee until we die.  
We're good people, Lord...*

*Lord, we cry  
We're good people  
But where will we go when we die?  
We're good people, Lord...*

WOMEN

*Dear Lord, redeem us  
We know how we sin  
Lord, let Thy mercy in.*

*We know we are hopeless  
Without Thee above  
Shower us with Thy love.*

CHURCHGOERS

*Forever and ever  
We'll always be true to you  
Worshipping always, Lord  
Hope can always win  
Forever and ever  
We'll always be good for you  
Show us your mercy, Lord!  
Save us from our sin!  
Amen!  
Amen!*

Ludwig motions with his arms for the congregation to be seated. They kneel.

LUDWIG

*I greet you all  
A lovely Sunday  
The church bells ring  
Out through the forest  
And hills and I*

*Share with you  
A message just laid  
On my heart by the  
Spirit of God and  
His Wisdom so*

*Listen all*

**“Least Among Us”**

LUDWIG

(clearing his throat)

*The slave's the least among us;  
With all his strength he serves.*

*But in the end he shall receive  
The greatness he deserves.*

*The king rules o'er his subjects.  
They serve on bended knee.  
He has a hundred servants, but  
They all are more than he.*

*For I tell you all the truth that  
Not one will pass the gates  
Until the least among us  
With he himself equates.*

*These are the teachings of the Father  
The Holy Ghost and Son.  
Obey their blessed commands and  
Your salvation shall be won.*

*Amen!*

#### CHURCHGOERS

*Amen!*

As he descends from the podium, an organ somewhere humming serenely, he coughs. He clears his throat, but continues to cough. Instead of subsiding, the coughing only increases, until he is hacking violently. Franzizka rushes up to him and pats him hard on the back.

FRANZIZKA

Ludwig! Are you all right? Are you all right?  
(turning to woman in pews)  
Ilsa! Go get some water! Hurry!

Ilsa runs off. Fritz and Elisabeth stand, watching their father anxiously.

FRANZIZKA

Sit down, sit down... That's it, take a breath, come on... that's it...

As she speaks, Ludwig struggles, wheezing, to take in air, but immediately begins to cough more violently than ever. He sinks to the floor.

FRANZIZKA

Ludwig! Are you all right? Ludwig!

The entire congregation rises in terror as the once serene organ music continues to play, violently now. The lights go out and the sound of the organ fades.

ELISABETH

God never had as faithful a servant as my father... and *He let him die...*  
painfully, slowly, agonizingly. He went mad. I can still hear him...  
screaming.

There is a loud, piercing wail from somewhere offstage. The sconces around a door on the back wall slowly light, revealing young Fritz, his ear pressed to the door, almost in terror. There is a second scream. Fritz jumps, and turns from the door, wringing his hands. He starts sniveling and sniffing, as if he had been crying for a long time. He wipes his eyes with his sleeve and walks to a large, canopied bed against the back wall of the Archive. He crawls up onto it and sits there, crying pitifully and swinging his legs. The door suddenly opens, and Franzizka steps into the room.

FRANZIZKA

Fritzschen?

At this, Fritz runs to his mother and buries his head in her dress, crying. Franzizka bends over and wraps her arms around him tightly. She then sits down with him on his bed.

YOUNG FRITZ

Momma, I'm scared...

FRANZIZKA

(haltingly)

Don't be scared... Please don't be scared... Now, it's very late. You need to go to bed.

YOUNG FRITZ

But I can't sleep...

FRANZIZKA

Hush now. Close your eyes. I'm right here.

YOUNG FRITZ

But I'm scared...

FRANZIZKA

I'll stay here, with you, until tomorrow.

She sings softly to him, patting him on the head, and guiding him under the covers and finally, putting him soundly to sleep.

**“A Mother’s Love” (Track 4)**

FRANZIZKA

*Close your eyes, dry your tears.*

*Let me banish your fears.  
Rest your head on my shoulder  
And come with me to the light.  
Give to me what is wrong.  
Trust in me and be strong  
For a mother's love  
Will make it all right.*

*Sometimes life is not fair.  
It seems like God is not there.  
But let me have all your burdens  
And I'll make everything light.  
Lean on me when you mourn  
When you're sad or forlorn  
For a mother's love  
Will make it all right.*

*I will take all your troubles  
And make the whole world seem bright.  
When you're hurting or sore.  
That's what mothers are for.  
For a mother's love  
Can make it all right.*

Franzizka kisses her son goodnight, as the room plunges into a peaceful darkness.

#### ELISABETH

Mother comforted us as best as she could... but the scar was painful. And then... we moved.

The lights come up again in the Archive, more brightly than before. Franzizka, young Elisabeth, and Fritz's two aunts and grandmother enter from various sides of the room, carrying sheets and cleaning supplies, as if preparing to give the house a spring cleaning. They rearrange some of the artifacts to suggest a kitchen and a living room. They scurry away, leaving Fritz to enter alone, as if avoiding the women. He sneaks quietly into the Archive. As he sings, he plops into a chair.

#### **“Don't Mess With the Women” (Track 5)**

##### YOUNG FRITZ

*Welcome to my dirty, humble home.  
We moved here only seven months ago.  
Grandpa lives a block away.  
Living with my aunts and grandma, too,  
Is tough with all the work we have to do.  
I learned this lesson one day:*

*Don't mess with the women in your life  
When they've got something for you to do.  
Trust me, it just isn't worth the strife  
And the pain that they'll put you through!*

Fritz is stopped by his imposing aunt, who approaches him determinedly, broom in hand. Fritz cowers under her wagging finger and nagging voice.

FRITZ'S AUNT

*Get up off the chair, you lazy louse!  
Look at this old, messy, dusty house!  
I've got some chores for you!  
Go sweep out the kitchen, get some wood.  
If it's not enough, I'll whip you good!  
You've got some work to do!*

She shoves the broom into his hand, and directs him to the kitchen with a pointed finger. Fritz complies humbly. The army of women suddenly joins them. They march in from all sides with various cleaning utensils, and are joined by young Elisabeth with a jump rope. The women begin scrubbing and sweeping the house, tidying up the room as Fritz dutifully sweeps the kitchen.

WOMEN

*Don't mess with the women who wash your clothes  
And clean and cook your food!  
To get hung by your toes, everybody knows,  
Is better than to face our mood!*

As he sweeps, Fritz moves out of the kitchen, where he is suddenly assaulted by his younger sister, who plants her hand firmly on her hip before she speaks.

LITTLE GIRL ELISABETH

(mockingly)

*Dearest elder brother, look at you!  
Why not do the things you wanted to?  
'Least I can get my way!  
All you had to do was take a stand!  
Now I'm off to play, so nyah, nyah, nyah!  
I'll have more than you, someday!*

She stamps her brother's foot before skipping away, leaving Fritz clutching his foot and dropping his broom.

WOMEN AND FRITZ

*Don't mess with the women in your life  
They'll turn on you in the end!*

*You've seen how they use the kitchen knife  
It may soon be up your rear-end!*

As Fritz returns to sweeping, Franzizka, dressed all in black, stops working and wipes a tear from her eye.

FRANZIZKA

(crying)

*Nothing's been the same since Ludwig died.  
Nothing has replaced the tears I've cried.  
It's getting hard to live.  
Whatever will I do without Ludwig dear?  
I hope the day of Christ's return is near...  
'Til then, something's got to give!*

OTHER WOMEN AND FRITZ

(going about their work)

*Don't mess with the woman all in black!  
She just can't take the pain.  
Nothing will ever bring him back  
Or take away the weight she's gained!*

ALL

*Welcome to our home, it's all we've got.  
When the Reverend died, we lost a lot.  
Nothing will be the same.  
Maybe it will all improve one day.  
'Til then we can only sing and pray  
In Christ Jesus' holy name!*

Fritz, realizing that the others are too busy to notice, drops his broom and darts off the stage.

ALL

*Don't mess with the women in your life  
When they've got something for you to do.  
Trust me, it just isn't worth the strife  
And the pain that they'll put you through!*

ELISABETH

I was such a loving little sister to him.

The lights go out again.

ELISABETH

You know, Fritz never did have much luck with the females. You have to a certain amount of... grace, I suppose. He was somewhat... lacking.

ERNST

(realizing she's trailing off the subject)

Nietzsche rejected God as a child, then? Upon the death of his father?

ELISABETH

Well, I didn't really know about his... atheism... until years later, when he came home from school one year. I didn't get to see him very often but I absolutely worshipped him. He was so very smart. You know he was accepted into the Pforta at a very young age?

ERNST

No, I did not...

ELISABETH

His... new beliefs surprised me... it wasn't only the idea of God that he left behind, but also this idea of *right* and *wrong*. Good and evil were just things people... made up, and they could be just as easily taken down and remade. His ideas fascinated me... but mother... they frightened her. Her little child thinking such things... it was very painful for her, and for everyone.

The lights go up in the Archive again, revealing that the living room area of Nietzsche's home in Naumberg. Nietzsche, as a college student, Elisabeth as a young woman, and Franziska are standing; Young Elisabeth hugs Nietzsche tightly, much to his distress, as Franziska stands by, smiling. Young Elisabeth is hideous, overly made-up and in a very gaudy dress, as if trying to appear genteel and upper-class but failing miserably.

YOUNG ELISABETH

(rapidly)

Oh, Friedrich, I'm so glad you're finally *home*! I've been telling everyone all about you and how smart you are and how great you're going to be some day... they'll all want to meet you, I'm sure. I've told them everything that you've written to me in your letters. I'm so happy to finally see you!

NIETZSCHE

Please... you're choking me...

YOUNG ELISABETH

Ooh... Sorry...

She releases him to finger his sore neck. He looks over at his mother.

FRANZIZKA

Friedrich...

She approaches him to embrace him. They hug, but it is a distant hug. Nietzsche is noticeably uncomfortable. Franzizka appears to be trying to suck all the emotion from him that he can, drinking in every meager drop that she can glean from him.

NIETZSCHE

I'm... I'm glad to be home, mother.

FRANZIZKA

And I'm glad to see my little Fritzschen... my, my, you've become a handsome young man. Let's sit down and you can tell us about the university.

YOUNG ELISABETH

Yes, tell us everything!

She shoves Nietzsche into a seat and takes one herself. Franzizka joins her daughter, although more slowly. As he speaks, his voice betrays little in the way of emotional warmth.

NIETZSCHE

Well, I... I... I'm *well*... my performance is excellent. Professor Ritschl thinks very highly of me.

YOUNG ELISABETH

(fawning)

Of course he does! You're the smartest in the whole school!

NIETZSCHE

The intellectual environment is very... stimulating. I've been able to think and ponder like never before. I've had... *realizations*. The world has opened up to me...

FRANZIZKA

Fritzschen, how's your health been? You were always sickly as a child and I'm—I worry about you more than I should...

NIETZSCHE

I'm fine, mother.

FRANZIZKA

You've been attending services?

The question is innocent enough, but Nietzsche is very noticeably disturbed by it. He turns his head from his mother in shame, stuttering as if wanting to lie but prevented from it by his conscience.

NIETZSCHE

Well, I—you... I—I—I know that... mother, please...

FRANZIZKA

Fritzschen, what's the matter? Have you not been attending services? Is your schedule too busy? Perhaps you should think about lightening your—

NIETZSCHE

(his eyes turned away, slowly and painfully)

No... no, mother, it's not that I can't. I *can*... it's just, I... I have little reason to anymore.

FRANZIZKA

(emotion strong and guilting)

Little reason...? Friedrich, I've worked *so hard* to raise you in the light... your father and I both... I tried very hard to keep your little faith strong when... when your father died. I can't... I can't stand the thought of it being thrown to waste... please understand... I love you with all my heart and I only want what's best for you.

NIETZSCHE

(takes in air uncomfortably; it's obvious he cannot say what he has been meaning to say without hurting anybody)

I... I don't... I don't believe it anymore. I—I've become an atheist.

He keeps his eyes turned away, uncertain as to what to expect from his sister and mother. Elisabeth's mouth falls open as she stares at him. Franzizka's reaction is far more disturbing... she sits in chilly silence, frowning slightly, showing traces that she might be starting to cry.

NIETZSCHE

Mother... mother, please... don't—please don't—

She stands up and brushes off her dress, shoving the thought of conflict away, which actually causes Nietzsche's distress to intensify even more somehow.

FRANZIZKA

So... how about dinner? I made those special potato cakes you like so much... I... I think they're almost ready...

She walks off as she says this, leaving Nietzsche to cower in shame. Right as she exits, we hear her sniff and see her brush away a tear. The door closes, and we hear sobbing. Nietzsche gets up and follows, but Elisabeth grabs him by the arm.

YOUNG ELISABETH

Friedrich, please... leave her... give her time.

NIETZSCHE

I couldn't even say anything... I couldn't—

YOUNG ELISABETH

She'll accept you in time... she loves you. Just give her time... it will heal...

NIETZSCHE

(voice quavering)

I can't— I can't just leave her like that...

YOUNG ELISABETH

Shush, now... it'll be all right. Trust me... Friedrich, tell me. Are... *a lot* of people at the university... atheists?

NIETZSCHE

I... suppose...

YOUNG ELISABETH

And do they believe in right and wrong?

NIETZSCHE

(uncomfortably looking over his shoulder towards his mother; as he talks, the irony of what he says is clear because he is obviously experiencing guilt and shame; he talks as if trying to convince himself more than anyone else)

I... some do, yes... I don't... (breathes a laugh) right and wrong... just things people have made up over the years. There's no real right and wrong... no real cause for remorse, or... guilt and hurt. Right and wrong... are for people to decide for themselves... and not allow themselves to be held back by traditional morality...

YOUNG ELISABETH

*Fantastic...*

The lights go out.

ELISABETH

The idea... *fascinated* me... a world where right and wrong hold no meaning. Even then I understood what it meant... and I sympathized with

my brother. He knew what he was doing. Mother... was so scared to let go. But she couldn't say anything to him... they couldn't talk... they *wouldn't* talk...

The lights come up on the other side of the room, the furniture arranged to suggest a kitchen. Franzizka is wiping her eyes with a handkerchief as she performs various menial tasks.

**“Little Minister’s Child (Reprise)”**

FRANZIZKA

(going about her chores as if everything were all right)

*Where have you gone, little minister’s child?  
Where is that sweet, smiling face?  
Mother is here, little minister’s child.  
Accept my loving, gentle embrace.*

*What kind of mother  
Would let her son play  
With hellfire and brimstone  
And act like it was okay?*

*Don’t run away, little minister’s child.  
Don’t take the joy from my heart.  
Mother is here, little minister’s child.  
Look at how you’ve ripped me apart...*

The lights fade to black again.

ELISABETH

Mother must’ve wondered what was out there that her little boy wanted so badly that he would reject God and his father... I don’t know if he was really sure at the time. He found it... he found what he was looking for later, when he was drafted. The military was strong then. We had an Iron Chancellor, and we were the mightiest empire in Europe. Friedrich, for the first time, tasted the sweetness of war and power.

The lights come up again, bright and yellow this time, revealing a line of men, carrying bundles, queued up to enlist for military service. The line leads out a door. There are various townfolk walking about the room, gossiping.

**“Spirit of Germany” (Track 7)**

TOWNSFOLK AND DRAFTEES

*The spirit of Germany  
Shall live on forevermore  
In the anthems of the soldiers  
Who are marching off to war.*

*The spirit of Germany  
Can never be put down.  
We sustain it in the music  
Of the tavern and the town.*

MAN

*When it comes to France,  
They don't stand a chance.*

DRAFTEE

*They have no choice but to lose!  
Cuz' we've got more force  
Than the French.*

OLD MAN

*Of course,  
If we don't, we'll just blame it on the Jews.*

As they sing, Nietzsche enters, with his own bundle, on the farthest side from the queue. He inquires silently of a nearby townsman for directions. He indicates the queue line. Nietzsche nods and heads over to it.

EVERYONE

*The spirit of Germany:  
A united force at last!  
Herr Bismarck has won over  
Our old divided past.*

*We'll fight on together now  
So Europe, you better watch out!  
With our soul and mighty power,  
Our vict'ry's not in doubt.*

The queue line moves forward significantly, leaving Nietzsche and a few others. At this point, a troop of uniformed soldiers, carrying rifles, enters the room, marching in perfect, synchronized formation. To the bark of orders from their commander, they perform for the townsfolk, demonstrating their military finesse. Nietzsche watches in barely contained admiration. Following the display, the soldiers exit. Nietzsche continues to stare at the spot where they performed. The line has already moved away. The man in front of him motions for him to come on.

DRAFTEE

Hey, buddy, the line's moving.

When Nietzsche fails to respond, the man shrugs and leaves him alone.

**“Will-to-Power” (Track 8)**

NIETZSCHE

*I've never  
Seen something  
Like this. I've  
Never known  
Just what it  
Means to have  
Such a will  
To power.*

Nietzsche appears to suddenly realize he has been left alone and packs up his bags. As soon the line has moved on, he stops for a moment.

NIETZSCHE

*Can I kill?  
Can I take  
The call  
Of Will-to-power?*

He exits, and the soldiers reenter the room from a different door, lining up at a desk at which sits a sergeant, shuffling papers. Nietzsche enters now, and sets his baggage down beside him as he gets at the end of the line.

NIETZSCHE

*Dark  
And the water runs deep  
And blears the light  
And drowns a force that through the years has lain asleep.  
And then it calls to me.*

*Marching boots and  
Flaring gun  
Turn their mouths to the sky  
And shout their truths to every waking eye.*

*A force  
That before which men will cower  
That leads us to man's highest hour  
To light the road to Will-to-power!*

By this point, it is Nietzsche's turn at the head of the line. He hands his envelope to the sergeant. He opens it.

SERGEANT

Any health problems?

NIETZSCHE

Yes.

SERGEANT

Nearsightedness?

NIETZSCHE

Yes.

SERGEANT

Any sudden fits or seizures?

NIETZSCHE

Yes.

SERGEANT

Can you do this?

He wiggles his index finger. Nietzsche looks confusedly at him before following his lead.

SERGEANT

You'll do. Next!

He stamps Nietzsche's papers and directs him away. Nietzsche is left for a moment in darkness.

NIETZSCHE

*Want*

*To overpower, control*

*Sets forth our acts.*

*It is our master; it is what defines our soul.*

*It is our everything.*

Uniformed soldiers enter from all sides. The "tree canopy" light comes up again to suggest an outdoor scene. A number of new draftees are being trained to do various things across the field. A sergeant approaches Nietzsche as he enters.

SERGEANT

All right, kid, let's see you mount a horse.

Two soldiers remove a large rocking horse from the wall of the Archive and set it before him. Nietzsche approaches it timidly.

NIETZSCHE

*Can I answer power's call?  
Oh, can I kill, or will I fall?*

As he sings, he lines up with the back of the horse, and takes a running start. He leaps over the back of the animal, landing squarely on the saddle, but hitting himself below the belt on the saddlehorn. He cringes in pain. His eyes widen before he falls to the ground, breaking a rib. He lays there, immobilized, as the other men laugh. He is left in darkness, again, lying on his back.

NIETZSCHE

(breathlessly)

*A force  
That before which men will cower.  
That takes man to his highest hour.  
That lights the road to Will-to-power...*

Franziska enters and helps her son up off the floor and into bed.

FRANZIZKA

My little son... I wish I could see you more often, and when you're in better condition.

She wipes his forehead with a cloth.

NIETZSCHE

Oh, mother, I just had the most exciting realization —

He suddenly cringes in pain.

FRANZIZKA

Go on... go on... tell me about this exciting realization.

Nietzsche strains to continue despite the pain.

NIETZSCHE

Just seeing those soldiers was a monumental experience for me. Have you ever thought, mother, how everything we do comes from a desire to overpower something?

FRANZIZKA

(uncomfortable)

No, Friedrich. Normally I just think about you and your sister. It's lonely around the house at times, but I think about you and it cheers me up somehow. I love you very dearly, Friedrich.

NIETZSCHE

Everything we do, every movement, every spasm, comes from a need to be in control of something. We learn things to be in control of knowledge. We fight wars to be in control of other nations. We eat to be in control of our health. Power, mother... power is the end to which everything else is a means.

FRANZIZKA

Even though you're hurt, I'm very grateful to have you home, Friedrich. Sometimes I worry about you. You were always something of a loner as a child, and, I worry that you get the kind of friends that people need.

NIETZSCHE

(for the first time paying attention to her)

Oh, I have friends, mother. Some very close friends, even. Anyway, as I was saying, since power is the goal of (he yawns as he says the word) existence, it logically follows that the will-to-power be allowed to run its course. (slowly falling asleep) Naturally, obstacles designed to prevent will-to-power from reaching its apex... should be... should be... removed. Right and wrong, mother... right and wrong can just go away... and... and... we'll be (yawn)... free...

FRANZIZKA

Sleep, child. I'm here for you.

He falls fast asleep with his mother above him.

FRANZIZKA

Power... and will... my sweet Fritzschen, what have I let you get yourself into? I've tried so hard to be a good mother but I... I'm failing you, Friedrich. I should have fought you... but I let you go because... I can't stand to bear the thought of driving a wedge between us. God, forgive me... for loving my son badly.

Everything fades to black again.

ELISABETH

The perversion of Christianity finally came to light to him... the constraining power of "good and evil" nauseated him. True power must have room to flex its muscles, unrestricted by right and wrong.

ERNST

(turning a page of his notes as if through with this line of inquiry)

I understand that your brother was good friends with Richard Wagner... tell me... how did they come to meet?

ELISABETH

Richard Wagner! Music of greatness! Friedrich adored him and his music... Friedrich met him at a dinner party in Leipzig. I was thrilled when he told me. To think... my dearest elder brother, eating with the greatest composer in all of history... sharing thoughts back and forth! When my brother graduated and became a professor at the University of Basel in Switzerland... did you know my brother hadn't even written his dissertation yet? Not yet out of college and already a professor!

ERNST

Yes... and about Wagner?

ELISABETH

Oh, yes, forgive me, young man. The memories of an old woman are dangerous. They take hold of me sometimes.

ERNST

It's all right, Frau Förster-Nietzsche. Please... tell me about Wagner.

ELISABETH

When Friedrich went off to Switzerland, he decided to pay a call to Wagner's villa at Tribschen...

A doorbell clangs. The lights come up in the Archive. The furniture has been arranged to suggest an elegant, sumptuous living room. A well-dressed butler enters from the side, and approaches a door on the back wall, presumably the front door. He opens it, revealing Nietzsche, his hat removed.

BUTLER

What may I do for you, mein Herr?

NIETZSCHE

(stuttering nervously)

Would you—w—w- would you please tell the Master that professor Friedrich Nietzsche is here?

BUTLER

Certainly. Please come in, professor.

NIETZSCHE

Oh—oh, yes, of course.

The butler exits and Nietzsche steps in, self-consciously shutting the door behind him. From somewhere off stage, we hear the banging of a piano, that slowly resolves itself into the sweet chromaticism of a Wagnerian ballad. Nietzsche's mouth hangs open as he absorbs the music, drinking it in. The music continues as the butler returns.

BUTLER

The Master will be down shortly.

NIETZSCHE

Thank you.

Nietzsche continues to listen to the music as the butler begins to dust at the furniture.

NIETZSCHE

I've—I've always adored his music.

BUTLER

Indeed.

NIETZSCHE

I never thought I'd be—I can't believe I'm really here. It's like a dream, almost. Or an intoxication. The artistry of his work is... amazing. A truly creative mind.

BUTLER

Very good, sir.

The butler leaves the room quietly as Richard Wagner clomps in. He is short and stocky, although his face is severe. He is ostentatiously dressed in the costume of a French painter. He gives two different, contradictory impressions – overbearing greatness and clown-like silliness.

WAGNER

Ah, Professor Nitsky, I believe I've had the pleasure of meeting you before.

He crosses over to him and shakes his hand vigorously.

NIETZSCHE

In—indeed, mein Herr—it's a great honor...

WAGNER

Please, please... I don't like to be called "mein Herr." It's too—

NIETZSCHE

Formal?

WAGNER

Average. Call me "Master."

NIETZSCHE

Of course... Master.

WAGNER

You still read Schopenhauer?

NIETZSCHE

Oh, well, I've since moved on. I actually have an essay I-

He is interrupted by Wagner.

WAGNER

Of course, of course, but while you're here, you **MUST** hear my latest work on the Ring. It will change the face of music forever. That's how spectacular it is! I've been pounding away at the piano for weeks now and I've got something, and you, my dear Nitsky, will have the rare opportunity to hear it. Don't worry, it's not overly long. Only a few hours. You have time, don't you? Of course you have time! Whatever it is can wait for a Wagnerian opera! Oh, and would you be so kind as to fetch Cosima for me?

NIETZSCHE

Cosima?

WAGNER

Yes, my mistress. She should be in the gardens.

NIETZSCHE  
(uncomfortable)

Mistress? I wasn't aware of any mistress...

WAGNER

Oh, come off it, professor. Don't be such a ninny. What respect can a great man have for petty institutions like *marriage*?

NIETZSCHE

Yes, yes, of course... I guess I ought to feel that way... but doesn't it bother people?

WAGNER

*Of course* it bothers them. That's not the point. Great men have to rise above... stake out their own rights and wrongs. We can't allow the condescending glances of dowdy old churchwomen to hold us back. Creativity *demand*s it, professor, *demand*s it.

NIETZSCHE

Yes, I see it, now. I've had such thoughts myself...

WAGNER

(patting him fiercely in the back)

Yes, of course you have! So... go fetch my mistress! And we can talk philosophy afterwards, eh?

Nietzsche coughs and pounds his chest, collecting himself before exiting. The lights fade to black again.

ELISABETH

Such a lifestyle! Such sumptuous wealth and... dignity and greatness. *This* was the life beyond good and evil. The result of the complete affirmation of will-to-power. You know, Nietzsche fell in love with her?

ERNST

Really?

ELISABETH

Yes, that day, in fact. In the gardens. Or so he told me. Of course... (bitterly) she wasn't all that attractive. Much too tall to be attractive. No, he fell in love with her commanding forcefulness and elegant presence. She was the living culmination of womanly power. Or maybe it was just our little tendencies to love what we can't have. He longed for that forcefulness and individuality he saw in her... I longed for it. We both longed for it. She had a baby, you know...

The lights come up again, with the "tree canopy" lights to suggest the gardens. There is an elegant little bench in the center of the stage, and a number of potted plants off to one side. Cosima is there, seated on the bench, cradling her baby. It is mewling softly. Birds chirp in the background. Cosima herself is dressed in white, and gives an overriding impression of elegance. She is tall and thin, and although her face is not amazingly attractive, her very presence commands attention and admiration. Nietzsche enters awkwardly from the side, but seeing her with the baby, is caught off guard, and hides behind the plants.

COSIMA

Hush now, little Siegfried... shh... mama's here...

**"Fly Home, Mama Bird"** (Track 10)

COSIMA

*Hush, little son, I'll hold you dear  
Come, quiet now, just know that I'm always near.  
I'll dry your tears.*

The sound of chirping grows louder. Intrigued, Cosima stands up to investigate.

COSIMA

*Hush, little son, you hear that cry?  
A nest of chicks the mother has left home to die!  
One wonders why...*

She slowly returns to her seat on the bench to rock the baby some more.

COSIMA

*Autumn winds  
Under her feathers  
I've seen her, I've seen her fly  
But mama bird  
Are you so far now  
You can't hear your children cry?*

*"Fly home! Mama bird, home!  
Mama bird, please, don't leave.  
Don't leave us alone.  
Fly home! Mama bird, home!  
Mama bird, please, don't leave.  
Don't leave us alone."*

*Mama bird  
What were you thinking?  
How could you believe  
That papa bird  
Really did love you?  
Could you be so naïve?*

*Hey, little bird, why do the deed?  
Why ask for something you did not even need?  
Why plant the seed?*

*Well, mama bird, those seeds have grown  
You can't root them up from the earth into which they've been thrown.  
Instead you've flown.*

*Mama bird  
Your children are hungry  
They must be relieved  
Mama bird  
How can they give love  
If they've never received?*

*Fly home! Mama bird, home!*

*Mama bird, please, don't leave.  
Oh, why don't you see?  
Fly home! Mama bird, home!  
Mama bird, or they'll be  
Just like me  
Just like me  
Don't let them end up like me.*

*Nights I prayed  
Into the twilight  
That someday, she'd come for me.  
All alone  
Before I had been born  
How could she just get up and flee?*

*Papa, he was a music star  
Europe he crossed by piano, always so far.  
Always so far.*

*Mama, she lived across the land  
Left us to be fed by a governess hand  
She had it all planned.*

*Mama bird  
That's how it works now  
But I'm going to change some things  
My little boy  
He'll know how to love now  
He'll never have to sing:*

*"Fly home."*

NIETZSCHE  
(softly, watching)

*Cosima, why must you bear his son?  
I can't understand what you have done.  
Why are you at his side?  
How can men like that show love to you?  
When your eyes are closed what can you do  
But keep it all inside?*

NIETZSCHE  
*Cosima, just let me near and I  
Will show you how true love can make one fly!  
Just let me near to you...*

COSIMA  
*Fly home! Mama bird, home!  
Mama bird, please, don't  
Leave, don't leave them  
Alone!*

*What is it that makes you think you love  
One who acts like he's so far above?  
I need a father, too!*

*Fly home! Mama bird, home!  
Mama bird, please, don't  
Leave, don't leave them  
Alone!*

*Cosima!  
Cosima!  
Cosima!  
Fly home!*

*Fly, fly home!  
Fly, fly home!  
Fly, fly home!  
Fly home!*

The baby is quiet now.

COSIMA

There, now. All better.

Nietzsche stands up, creating a rustle in the bushes. Cosima starts.

NIETZSCHE

Oh... I'm, um, I'm... I'm terribly sorry, miss Cosima... I didn't even realize.

COSIMA

It's perfectly all right, Herr...

NIETZSCHE

Nietz-- Nietzsche. Professor Friedrich Nietzsche. Basel University. Your... your... the Master told me to come fetch you from the gardens. He was going to play his newest work for me... I believe.

COSIMA

Ah, delightful! I hope you have plenty of hours to spare... I'm afraid Richard has very little conception of time when he's performing.

NIETZSCHE

(stepping out of the bushes towards her)

The length doesn't matter to me at all.

COSIMA

Really, now? I would've thought a University professor like you would have very little time to spare.

NIETZSCHE

What difference do my little professorial duties make when I can spend time with the composer of the greatest music ever written? There's never been written anything like it. It's truly one of the greatneses of Germany... if not the only greatness.

COSIMA

Now, don't be so hard on the Fatherland.

NIETZSCHE

(pauses for a moment)

Cosima... er, this may seem terribly forward, but...

COSIMA

Hmm?

NIETZSCHE

Would you... er, um... read this?

Nietzsche produces an essay of his. Cosima takes it and scans it over.

NIETZSCHE

It's still in its rough stages, but I would be flattered if you would look over it... tell me what you think.

COSIMA

What's this?

NIETZSCHE

It's an essay.

Cosima smiles as if to say "I knew that," but Nietzsche catches her early.

NIETZSCHE

Like an outline... for a book I plan to write one day. It's called *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*. I could never have written it without the help of Richard's wonderful operas.

COSIMA

Sounds very interesting.

NIETZSCHE

You think so? Really?

COSIMA

Well, I haven't even read it *yet*!

NIETZSCHE

I'll explain it to you. You see, my contention is that, well, there are basically two kinds of, how to say... forces, I suppose, that guide human

development. These two are all present, in some degree or other, in each of us.

COSIMA

Okay, go on.

They both sit down on the bench together as he talks.

NIETZSCHE

The first is Apollo. Apollo, you see, is the god of civilization and culture. The second is Dionysus, the god of revelry and drunkenness. They are constantly at war, you see, in the civilization as a whole, as well as within each of us personally.

COSIMA

Apollo and Dionysus... how interesting. I've never thought about it that way before.

NIETZSCHE

(drawing close to her, perhaps a little uncomfortably for her)  
It is my belief, you see, that real happiness, that real beauty and meaning, is found in the satisfying of our Dionysian instincts. So long as we allow the Apollo in each of us to suppress what we know will make us happy, we only tear ourselves up and plunge ourselves into the abyss.

COSIMA

I never pictured you as someone proclaiming the virtues of drunkenness and revelry.

NIETZSCHE

Well, I may not show it, but that's what I believe. (stands up and turns away) All my life I've been taught that we ought to deny ourselves pleasure and give up everything for others. Pride and selfishness are wrong... and *evil*, they said. But I've found... so much beauty and... happiness in the self. In satisfying the self. (he turns to Cosima, who has startlingly cuddling the baby, and stares at her longingly) So much beauty and happiness... that's what Dionysus is to me. Simply letting yourself reach out and grasp what you want... I never understood the intoxicating power... the natural power... of the self, of this world beyond good and evil, as a child. And now it blossoms before me... (he turns away from her, guiltily; she hasn't noticed) Forgive me. I'm just a silly professor with wild ideas.

COSIMA

Nonsense, professor. You have very interesting ideas. I shall be sure to read this the moment I have the opportunity.

NIETZSCHE

That would make me very happy.

The lights fade slowly to black.

ELISABETH

When I heard... oh, when I heard... I nearly fainted from excitement! My brother something of a regular houseguest at the Wagner's. A houseguest of greatness. And I simply wasn't going to allow myself to be left out. This was my chance! I offered my services to Friedrich as a housekeeper, and he accepted. I went to live with him in Switzerland, and I went with him to the Wagner's villa. During those days... life was quietly rising and swelling within us—affirming us, as Friedrich would say.

The lights come up on the area around the bed. The furniture has been arranged to suggest Nietzsche's flat at the university. The desk and chair have been set up near to the bed, and loose papers and books are everywhere. The bed is unmade. There is a new piece of furniture, however – a telescope set up at the window, the lens thrust through the curtains. Nietzsche is writing furiously at the desk, while Elisabeth is at the telescope.

ELISABETH

I must admit, my housekeeping left... something to be desired.

YOUNG ELISABETH

Friedrich, I think I see her! I think I see her!

NIETZSCHE

(irritated)

Elisabeth, *please*, I'm trying to get this written...

YOUNG ELISABETH

It's Cosima, in the gardens, and she's with somebody... some big-to-do. Friedrich, we really should've gone today. We could've met them. They could've met *me*... and had the pleasure of *knowing* me... and sure would *like it* an *awful LOT*...

NIETZSCHE

Please, Elisabeth. I'm not at all feeling well and I have to get this done. You're the housekeeper... why don't you keep house? Clean up these papers everywhere.

YOUNG ELISABETH

(still looking through telescope)

Please, Friedrich, let's go tomorrow!

NIETZSCHE

Elisabeth, they're probably tired of us by now...

YOUNG ELISABETH

Friedrich, you're letting life pass you by. I'm sick of sitting around your apartment watching them through a little lens. I want to be there... on the other side, with them. Please, Friedrich.

The lights fade on that side and come up on the other. Here, the same furniture previously seen at Wagner's villa has been set up, arranged around an old piano against the wall. Wagner sits at the piano, hammering out the dramatic final chords of his latest work. All around him are various dignitaries, all elegantly and expensively dressed, as well as Cosima. Nietzsche and Elisabeth are there as well, Nietzsche behind, staring longingly at Cosima, while Elisabeth is in the thick of it, kissing gloved hands and carrying a drink and straining to act dignified. She is betrayed by her garish makeup and costume.

ELISABETH

The people we met... royalty! Dignitaries! The elite, the noblesse! And there I was, in the thick of it, drinking it all in, like expensive wine. And my brother was my key, my entryway. He would talk philosophy and I would talk him. And he would stare at Cosima, and sometimes... she would look back. She must've known he was in love with her... surely she knew. He was never good with women... he couldn't hide anything. She took advantage of him.

The lights fade again, and when they come up, Nietzsche is alone with Cosima. They sit near to each other in the Wagnerian furniture. The piano tinkles in the background, and we can make out the underlying theme of "Don't Mess With the Women."

NIETZSCHE

Dionysus reigns tonight, Cosima! The artistic will-to-power surrounds me and engulfs me here!

COSIMA

Friedrich, I just want to thank you for looking after the little children while Richard and I went to Munich. I appreciate it very dearly.

NIETZSCHE

I... I thought I didn't like little children, but you know, they really are sweet things... I'm happy to look after them for you.

COSIMA

You know, I *hate* to impose...

NIETZSCHE

It's my pleasure. Cosima... I... have I told you about my latest ideas?

COSIMA

I understand your visiting Italy in a week...

NIETZSCHE

Yes... yes, I am, but Cosima... let me tell you what I've been thinking about. Just being here with you has inspired me... I see that the truly great can't allow themselves to be constrained by... traditional morality. Morality is not for the strong—it was invented by the weak to *constrain* the strong. Weak people resent other's strength, so they tell them that strength is evil and weakness is good... and as a child I never quite understood why that seemed backwards and wrong. But now, seeing your lifestyle... I understand perfectly. Yes... strength is what is good. We must be *strong, forceful, creative, powerful*...

COSIMA

(feigning interest by smiling)

Friedrich, forgive me, but I have a favor to ask you...

NIETZSCHE

Anything, Cosima.

COSIMA

Richard... there was some furniture he wished to purchase in Milan... would you be so kind as to pick it up for us? I realize it's a lot to ask...

NIETZSCHE

Oh no, it's no trouble at all. I wasn't planning on visiting Milan, but it's not... so far out of the way that I couldn't—

COSIMA

Thank you so much, professor. You're a dear, dear friend.

The lights fade with the piano music.

ELISABETH

He was such a soft-heart. He never could say no. Especially not to someone who enchanted him the way she did... who infatuated him.

ERNST

I simply can't believe that a man who wrote about the morality of power in glowing terms would let a woman walk all over him like that...

ELISABETH

There was always a part of Friedrich that he could never reconcile with himself... that he couldn't overcome. His peculiar personal weakness, his pathetic conscience. He wrote brilliantly... but it was up to me to fulfill his writings. Up to me to rise beyond good and evil, where he could not. I would take the lead, climb the ladder. I planned to put myself on the other end of the telescope...

The lights come up on another part of the stage. An elegant dinner party is in swing. The well-dressed elite of Germany are milling about with drinks in hand. We see also Cosima, in the middle, dressed in white so that she stands out above the rest of the guests. She extends a graceful hand to be kissed by a nobleman, and laughs. Everything about her reeks of regal splendor. Young Elisabeth appears, her makeup garish and her hair a mop. She stops at the edge of the party and looks inward, her mouth hanging open as she watches Cosima.

#### ELISABETH

I looked up to Cosima... I envied her... and I watched her every move. One day that elegance and feminine power would be *mine*. She didn't care much for my brother's philosophical ravings but I listened... I listened well and took in every fantastic word. He wrote of power, and in her I saw power. And I thought I knew how she got it... to be a woman of greatness, one had to ride upon a man of greatness. She had hers, and I would have mine.

At this point, Wagner enters, to the hush of the crowd. He approaches Cosima and links arms with her, forming an almost ridiculous pair with his shortness and her height. After having commanded everyone's attention, he makes an announcement.

#### WAGNER

(at the end of his speech, his words begin to fade away and overlap with those of the old Elisabeth, still narrating)

Dear friends, I have important news for you. The spirit of Germany is to flow in brilliant artistry, and you are all invited to witness the first burst of light. I am building an opera house in Bayreuth, in the village, near the rural heart of the country. It will be... magnificent, the culmination of many long years of intense laboring, the testament to the power of the German people and their creative force. There will be an opera festival... the third cycle of the greatest German opera, *the Ring of the Nibelungen*, shall be performed in all its grand splendor...

#### ELISABETH

And then, I met him... the man I thought would carry me where I wanted to go...

As Wagner continues to narrate in silence. Young Elisabeth bumps into a Bernhard Förster, a handsome young man beside her. He spills his drink. They lean over simultaneously to pick it up and end up hitting their heads together.

YOUNG ELISABETH

(whispering)

I'm terribly sorry, I don't believe we've met...

FÖRSTER

My name is Förster... Bernhard Förster...

The lights slowly fade around them, with a soft light illuminating the young Elisabeth and Bernhard for a moment before everything goes to black.

ELISABETH

He was a fierce anti-Semite... he told me of his big plans... a colony in Paraguay of nothing but Aryans and vegetarians. Here was my ticket to power... the great man that I would ride to the top of the social ladder. Of course, Friedrich didn't approve... he never understood.

ERNST

Didn't approve of what?

ELISABETH

Bernhard courting me. Pay attention. (hits him sharply with her cane)

ERNST

(wincing)

What's not to approve of, anyway?

ELISABETH

(suddenly sounding more awkward)

Er... forget I said anything, it's not important... my memory must be failing me...

ERNST

No, please, this *is* important...

ELISABETH

(striking him with the cane a second time)

No it isn't! No it isn't! Friedrich hated the Jews, too, he hated them... just like everyone... he understood their decadence and their need for extermination...

The lights come up in the area by the bed. The desk and chair have been set up to suggest Nietzsche's flat. Young Elisabeth is on the bed, her face turned from her brother, who stands, waving his arms at her.

NIETZSCHE

Of *course* I don't like it! The man is a... the man is a charlatan! You know I feel about the Jews... and especially about people who puff themselves up with sickening racial pride because their hair is yellow and their eyes are blue!

ELISABETH

He understood completely. He wished us well in our courtship...

YOUNG ELISABETH

(half-hysterical)

You don't understand! They're all that way! Every last one of them! Wagner, even! The Master!

NIETZSCHE

Then, they *all* sicken me! Racism sickens me...

YOUNG ELISABETH

And what about all those things you said about going beyond good and evil, huh? About morality being something that the strong make for themselves! Or did you forget?

NIETZSCHE

What—I— *hatred* is NOT beyond good and evil! I will *not* approve of it and if you want to stay under the same roof with me you will see no more of that horrible man!

She stands up and slaps him. It had no more force than she expected. Nietzsche sinks to the floor, holding his face and coughing.

YOUNG ELISABETH

Oh, Friedrich, I'm sorry...

She kneels down to him to help him, as the lights go out.

ELISABETH

Life was easy and carefree, then... but it all changed at the Bayreuth Opera Festival. We had lived in the splendor of Wagnerian greatness for so long... but it took on a whole new light to my brother. He was getting very ill... his health was slowly giving way. It took a great deal of... forceful discussion... to convince him to come with me to the new opera house.

We shouldn't have gone... something must have come between him and Cosima.

The lights come up again. The German elite are milling again at the Bayreuth Opera House. Nietzsche and Young Elisabeth are standing together in a crowd. Elisabeth is laughing and talking with Förster beside her. Nietzsche seems remarkably uncomfortable; he stares at the floor.

MAN STANDING NEAR

Oh, come off it, professor. What's to get down about? This is an occasion for celebration! The German spirit, and all!

NIETZSCHE

I... I suppose the "spirit of Germany" just doesn't seem like much cause for celebration any more...

He glares intently at Bernhard and his sister. Wagner and Cosima enter, arm in arm, smiling gaily and making unheard conversation with a particularly royally-dressed pair of people.

NIETZSCHE

Cosima's here... I must go see her... excuse me.

He approaches her and touches her on the arm. She turns from the crowd and they meet eyes.

COSIMA

Professor, so good of you to come...

NIETZSCHE

Cosima, I'd—if I could, I'd like to talk with you about something... privately.

COSIMA

Um... I'm terribly sorry... is it something that can't wait?

WAGNER

Cosima, tell the Countess about that dress you saw in Venice...

NIETZSCHE

I... I suppose it can...

Nietzsche turns awkwardly away as Cosima returns to the conversation. He stands alone in the middle of the room, staring at her. After a few moments, their conversation ends and the royal couple exits. Wagner and Cosima turn to each other, and as Nietzsche watches, they kiss. The kiss is made ridiculous by the differences in their heights, almost

repulsive. They sit together in some chairs off to the side of the stage, chatting with some guests and holding each other's hands. Nietzsche continues to stare at her. The other guests freeze and the lights about them dim.

NIETZSCHE

She cares about him that much... it makes no sense to me... I must've known it all the time but I've never felt it until now...

**“Power of the Heart” (Track 2)**

NIETZSCHE

*I saw your eyes,  
My soul overflowed.  
A willful force of art*

*Sprung from those eyes.  
And, gently, it showed  
The power of the heart.*

*Still, I now know  
That those eyes are closed  
And I will keep the distance.*

*That brilliant light  
I find now opposed  
By some strange new resistance.*

*I can  
Learn to turn my eyes  
Keep to the shadows  
If you won't  
Deny me  
A flicker  
But still then  
If you'd have me leave  
I'm strong enough not to grieve.*

*I understand  
It's not meant for you  
To be my better part.*

*I'll keep away  
And learn to subdue  
The power of the heart.*

*Why then  
Does it feel so right*

*When it is wrong?  
This burning  
Desire  
This smolder-  
Ing fire  
Must fade now.  
I'll make it!*

*Grant me the strength  
To steadfastly greet  
A world where we're apart.*

*I'll learn to hope  
The mind can defeat  
The power of the heart.*

Nietzsche breathes a deep sigh as he takes a final look at the happy pair, and leaves the stage in a huff. Wagner and Cosima exit, as well as Förster. Young Elisabeth gives him a kiss as he leaves; they wave. This all occurs in silence, while old Elisabeth narrates.

#### ELISABETH

I suppose that did it for him... jealousy can do that to a man. Everything becomes repulsive... nauseating. What was once dignity became conceit... what was once aristocratic power became snobbery... what was once brilliant music became mere sentimentality. The life that my brother yearned for... that I yearned for... sickened him. Everything sickened him. All the royalty... the elegance... the grandeur and splendor... it never lost its luster with me. I still wanted it... I had to try.

Young Elisabeth, now alone in a room filled with the elite, plants her hands on her hips.

#### YOUNG ELISABETH

Hmm... a room filled with the German high and mighty... they will all soon have the pleasure of knowing *me*...

#### **“Dance of the Social Ladder” (Track 13)**

For no real discernable reason, she grabs two rich folk standing nearby and presses one to each of her sides.

#### YOUNG ELISABETH

C'mon, everybody, let's get this party started!

She begins to dance in a bizarre fashion, bothering and touching the other people as she sings.

YOUNG ELISABETH

*Come, ye wealthy!  
Come elite!  
Line ye up  
And kiss the feet  
Of the girl that all men want to meet!*

*He-eheheheheheheh-llo!  
Ain't this a treat? Ain't this a fancy show?  
Ain't it, though?  
A tiny step and then the cash will flow  
Lihihihihihihihihike snow!*

*Turn my eyes to the sky!  
Sure, I can climb the social ladder  
Just to make my pocket's fatter,  
But where's the fun, then?  
Am I all done, then?  
Is that the end of it?  
It makes ya cry-eyeyeyeyeye-y!*

*So now I start to climb,  
So when they strike eleventh hour  
You will see who's got the power  
And connections.  
Not just protection  
Not just the moneyedness  
A lust to fly-high-ay!*

*Climb the ladder of greed  
I have no ethics, morals, scruples, conscience  
I've got everything I need.  
Everything indeed.*

*Put your foot to the rung!  
And if you find a rung is missing  
You can use the butt you're kissing  
Don't be picky  
'Cuz butts are sticky  
They can carry you  
Right by the tongue...*

*Soon I'll be at the peak!  
And then won't it be surprising  
When you see a FULL MOON rising*

At this, she turns the back away from the audience and promptly moons (showing her pantaloons) the entire group of rich people, throwing up her poofy dress. By this time they are all quite blatantly offended.

*From above you!  
Folks, I love you,  
Yes even those of you  
Who frankly reek...*

*Then, when I reach the top,  
I'll shove the ladder off and watch you hit the earth.  
For what it's worth I'll  
Protect my domicile  
And then I'll... stop!*

As she bows to a lack of applause from behind her, she smiles, excitedly. Nietzsche suddenly bursts into the room. He grabs his sister by the arm and begins to drag her off.

YOUNG ELISABETH

Hey, what's the big idea? Let me go!

NIETZSCHE

We're going home. Going... away from here.

YOUNG ELISABETH

No, Friedrich, please—

They stop at the appearance of Wagner and Cosima.

WAGNER

Professor Nitsky, is something the matter?

NIETZSCHE

I'm sorry... I'm feeling ill... I... I must be going...

WAGNER

Well, if you need medical treatment I could-

NIETZSCHE

No—no... I just need to... need to leave this place...

He starts off again, dragging Elisabeth with him.

YOUNG ELISABETH

Hey, now, watch the dress! Watch the—

He suddenly stops, and turns back to Wagner.

NIETZSCHE

I admit it freely, Richard Wagner, I loved everything about you... this life beyond good and evil that you allowed me to taste. But I can't stand it anymore. I can't stand your sentimentality... your arrogance... your racism... I can't stand *you*.

WAGNER

Professor, please don't—

**“Spirit of Germany (Reprise)” (Track 12)**

NIETZSCHE

*The spirit of Germany  
I thought flowed through your hands  
But now I know this “spirit” is  
A disease upon the land.*

*The spirit of Germany,  
I know from whence it hales:  
From the pit of indigestion  
From its beers, its wines and ales.*

With that, he stands there a moment, his chest heaving, his finger still pointing at him. Unable to think of anything more, he grabs Elisabeth again and storms away.

YOUNG/OLD ELISABETH

No! Please leave me! Let me go—let me— don't make me leave—no! I want to stay, I want to stay! Please let me stay! No, let me go! Let me go! Let me go! Please! Please...

Her pleas continue offstage as the lights go out and Nietzsche drags her away... simultaneously two attendants enter the room and begin taking the older Elisabeth from her wheelchair. The old Elisabeth's cries echo your younger counterparts as she is taken from the room.

FEMALE ATTENDANT

It's time for your bath... if you'll excuse me, mein Herr.

ERNST

Of course...

He watches as they take her away. Once she is gone, he cuts on the radio. It begins to play snippets of a Wagnerian opera, distorted and distant. The curtain closes as the radio fades to static, meaningless noise.

## ACT TWO

### SCENE 1:

*The same room, although this time outfitted with the necessary furniture to provide settings for the second act.*

Lightning flashes from behind the drawn curtains; thunder rumbles softly in the distance. Elisabeth is back in her wheelchair, much calmer looking since her bath. Ernst is standing, fingering the stacks of documents on the shelf nearby.

#### ELISABETH

He took us into the Alps, you know. A little cottage... it might have been very nice except that it was a complete pain in the rear to see Bernhard. Mostly we wrote letters... to mother, to Friedrich's colleagues back at the university... Wagner sent my brother a copy of his latest opera, Parsifal. The message was far too Christian for his taste. He threw it in the fire, despite its... impressive monetary value. He... he spent most of his time thinking, depressed and getting sicker and sicker all the time. He had this rock out in the woods. He called it his "Thinking Rock." He would go there... and stew in his depression. Then, one day, he started writing his thoughts down...

The lights come up in the rest of the museum. The "tree canopy" light comes on again to suggest the forest. There is a large rock jutting up from the floor – his Thinking Rock. Nietzsche enters, limping a bit, coughing somewhat. Ambling up to his thinking rock, Nietzsche leans against it and takes a few deep breaths, hoping to clear his head.

#### **"Least Among Us (Reprise)" (Track 14)**

#### NIETZSCHE

*I feel the wind around me,  
The cold's advancing tide.  
In spite of my declining health  
I feel a bliss inside.*

*I clothe myself with nature  
Although I'm feeling tired.  
But as I gaze at old friend, Rock,  
I start to feel inspired.*

*I've left my faith behind me,  
Matured to higher calls.  
I feel the void and darkness  
Into which my thinking falls.*

*But out of winter dark I  
Hear Dionysus's rhyme.*

*He says to me, "My Friedrich,  
"It is Zarathustra's time."*

*So now the least among us  
Shall see his proper place!  
The Superman will soon arise:  
A new post-human race!*

At this, the Song of Zarathustra begins to boom out and the Archive becomes divided into two halves. On the left is Nietzsche at his thinking rock as before, on the right is the dark, foggy stage for Nietzsche's drama that will play out. Becoming inspired, Nietzsche takes out some paper and begins to hastily scribble his ideas. He sits down and sings as he writes. As he sings the first verse, the cloaked figure of Zarathustra appears in the center of the right side of the stage, walking somewhere, his cloak flowing in the wind.

**"The Song of Zarathustra"**

NIETZSCHE

*Come, Zarathustra, come!  
From the mountain, down!  
From the East, rise as the sun!  
Show them your truth, Zarathustra!  
Show them your truths, every one!*

At this point, a poor farmer appears next to Zarathustra.

NIETZSCHE

*Came Zarathustra to  
A man, a saint,  
Who said to him as the man reaped:*

OLD SAINT

*"Zarathustra, now awake, why do you come  
"To a land now asleep?"*

NIETZSCHE

*Thus Zarathustra spake:*

ZARATHUSTRA

*"As I love mankind,"  
"I came thus down from above!"*

OLD SAINT

*"Man is a thing too imperfect."  
"God, now, is all that I love!"*

NIETZSCHE

*So Zarathustra left,  
Hearing what he said.*

ZARATHUSTRA

*“Does he not know God is dead?”*

The man walks on, and Zarathustra continues his “journeying.” Now, there appears a crowd of people getting ready to watch a tight rope walker. The crowd is talking amongst themselves.

NIETZSCHE

*So Zarathustra came to some men.  
Starting to speak, he yelled o’er the din.*

ZARATHUSTRA

*“Listen ye people, hear”  
“What I have to say.”*

NIETZSCHE

*Thus he spake unto the mass:*

ZARATHUSTRA

*“I teach you the Superman, hear me!”  
“For man is a thing to surpass!”*

NIETZSCHE

*But did the people spurn  
And laugh, and turn  
To watch a tightrope walker dance.  
In colored costume and array he stepped upon  
The rope, smiled as he pranced!*

*Wobbling, he teeters, flailing, he calls.  
O’er the abyss, he cries as he falls.*

*Scattered the crowd, they fled.  
He lay and bled.  
But came Zarathustra and knelt  
At the head of the man dying on the ground  
Listened, knew how he felt.*

ROPE DANCER

*“My life’s a failure, I’ll  
“See you soon in hell.  
“I was good but then I fell.”*

ZARATHUSTRA

*“There’s no hell or heaven to go to.  
“Don’t worry for all is well!”*

*“I tell you he will come.  
“Come like lightning, flash!  
“Teach all men the upward song!  
“Superman, come! Show the people  
“To go beyond right and wrong!”*

*“Come Übermenschen, now God is dead!  
“Show all the people!”*

NIETZSCHE

*The prophet said.*

*Come, Zarathustra, come!  
From the mountain, down!  
From the East, rise as the sun!  
Show men your truth, Zarathustra!  
Show men your truths, every one!*

*Come, Zarathustra...*

Finished writing for now, he sets his papers down, and the lights fade to black.

ELISABETH

When he told me of his new creation... his new brainchild... naturally I saw it immediately for its beauty and treasured it...

The lights come up on the area near the bed. There is a rocking chair, which Elisabeth sits at, sewing something. Nietzsche enters, taking off his coat as he does so.

YOUNG ELISABETH

Ah, so the great professor Friedrich Nietzsche returns to his glorious home. It’s a good thing we have your pension or we might have to lower our standard of living even below zero!

NIETZSCHE

*(coughs)*

Don’t worry, Lisbeth, I’ve got it all figured out.

YOUNG ELISABETH

Oh really? What a laugh.

NIETZSCHE

I had a... a marvelous revelation by the thinking rock today. I have it all written down. Here, look.

Nietzsche delivers a stack of loose papers to his sister, who snatches them away and begins to glance over them rapidly, throwing papers left and right.

**“Elisabeth’s Response to the Song of Zarathustra” (Track 15)**

YOUNG ELISABETH

(mockingly, incredulously)

*“Come Übermenschen, now God is dead.”*

*“Come show the people, the prophet said.”*

*I thought that you were sick. I had  
Thought, but I now know you’re mad!  
This stuff is trash! It isn’t good, it’s bad!*

*Know I was almost there!  
Until you dragged me, kicking, screaming  
From the dream that I was dreaming  
And why, I ask you?  
And don’t you even think I care?*

Nietzsche scrambles to recollect the papers and sort them back in order.

NIETZSCHE

Elisabeth—Elisabeth what are you doing? Don’t you understand? This book... this book will change everything! It’s revolutionary! When I finish writing it, I’ll send it off... and people will pay to read it. Lots of people will pay. You’ll be living in the lap of luxury. Just give it a chance, Elisabeth... I’ll explain it to you...

YOUNG ELISABETH

Money? HA! What about your other works? What kind of money are *they* bringing in? Beyond Good and Evil? Nothing! Genealogy of Morals? Even less than nothing! Your “writing” has done nothing but incur needless expense and at least those were scholarly works! This garbage is like something taken out of Luther’s Bible! You can’t even read it! It’s incomprehensible!

NIETZSCHE

But this will change everything! Never before have I been able to encapsulate all my philosophies in one coherent, beautiful work such as this!

YOUNG ELISABETH

And aren’t you modest about it, too?

She tosses Friedrich a broom. He drops the papers to catch it.

YOUNG ELISABETH

If you're going to live here, you're going to help make it sanitary — so get started! You can get back to your writings whenever I feel happy about living here!

The lights fade again.

ELISABETH

Of course, the work did poorly at first... only a few copies were printed. The publisher was printing hymnals and anti-Semitic tracts... but one of those copies made it to Wagner in Venice. He was already dying, and going steadily mad... my brother's book inflamed him... he thought he detected all sorts of... slanders against him in the book. And anyone who hadn't known my brother couldn't have told... but he may have been right. Sometimes I wonder if my brother wasn't somehow enacting vengeance on him... through his writing... writing was his only weapon, the only thing he had control over. And he used it against his enemies.

The lights come up over the bed area. Richard Wagner lies in it, dying. Cosima sits over him, tending to him.

WAGNER

(mumbling)

Oh! I'll... how can he... why did he...

COSIMA

Richard, what's the matter?

Richard moans, indicating a manuscript he has been holding. Cosima picks it up and scans the cover.

COSIMA

What? I didn't know Friedrich had written anything since his last book...

WAGNER

Well there it is. The most... (coughs)... offensive piece of writing I've read in a long time. The man's mad. I should've known... I should've known better than to...

COSIMA

Calm down, calm down, Richard... everything's all right... it'll be all right... calm down.

WAGNER

Look at it, Cosima! *Look at it!*

COSIMA

Richard, I don't understand! What's wrong with it?

WAGNER

Not everyone will understand, no! I may be the only one! The only one who knows! But it's in there, as plain as day!

COSIMA

What could possibly be in this...

WAGNER

*The death of God* don't you see? Don't you see? He's attacking me!

COSIMA

Richard! Are you- could Friedrich really write such a thing? I don't understand! Please, Richard... tell me... tell me about the book.

Dying and by now quite mad, Wagner settles down, apparently to die, and weakly begins to babble. Cosima gives up trying to argue with him.

**“God is Dead” (Track 16)**

WAGNER

*Europe is dying  
Along with me.  
And painfully.*

*Nietzsche has killed her  
Though she yet dies.  
Stabbed, she wails and cries.*

*I thought I had left God  
Thought that I knew  
All that was true.*

*Why does it hurt me?  
Why do I bleed?  
When he writes and I read:*

*“God is dead.  
“God is dead.”  
Now God dies  
And I die with Him.*

*Blessed by a madman,  
Cursed by a saint  
Now dim and faint.*

*Father of music  
Killed by a song.  
Betrayed by lusts for wrong.*

*I know that you loved me,  
But see with your eyes  
Why Wagner dies.*

*He writes of God's death,  
But can you not see  
That the one who dies is me?*

*"God is dead.  
"God is dead."  
Now God dies,  
And I die with Him.*

Leaning his head back, Wagner dies. Cosima sobs pitifully over his body for a few moments as the lights go out.

ELISABETH

Wagner's death... hit my brother very hard, I think. Since that day when he got news of it, his life began to fall apart.

The lights return and we see Nietzsche at his writing desk, pensive, staring into space. Young Elisabeth enters.

YOUNG ELISABETH

Friedrich, what's the matter? Did you ever write back to mother?

NIETZSCHE

I received a letter from one of my old colleagues... Apparently my book isn't appreciated. They claim it's too controversial, too religious in nature. Not scholarly. What are they afraid of, anyway? They're just afraid... comfortable in their misconceptions... I don't care about anybody anymore. There's no one left... no one... no one except maybe her...

YOUNG ELISABETH

"Her?"

**"The Letter Song (Dear Cosima Wagner)" (Track 17)**

NIETZSCHE

*Cosima*  
*Dear Cosima*  
*Why does she stay away?*  
*Why won't she send a word to me?*  
*What does she think?*  
*What can the reason be?*  
*Dear 'Lisabeth,*  
*Won't you write her for me?*

He clutches his sister's arm imploringly. She looks at him with wide eyes for a moment, but melting just a tiny bit, sighs, and prepares to write Cosima for Nietzsche.

#### YOUNG ELISABETH

*Dear Cosima Wagner,*  
*I write at my brother's deep request.*  
*Why don't you write?*  
*Did he offend you*  
*With his new work?*  
*I know that sometimes*  
*He is a jerk.*  
*I was not impressed.*

*But understand*  
*My brother loves you, it's plain.*  
*Dear Cosima,*  
*May it not be in vain!*

*Elisabeth Nietzsche*

The stage becomes divided again, as it was before, with Nietzsche's house on one side and Wagner's bedroom in the other. Cosima is there, with Elisabeth's letter and paper and pen of her own. She sings as she writes her response.

#### COSIMA

*Dear 'Lisabeth Nietzsche,*  
*Know that I bear no ill will towards you.*  
*But also know*  
*That before my husband's*  
*Soul left its home*  
*He read your brother's*  
*Blasphemous tome.*  
*What can I conclude?*

*How can I love*  
*The murderer of my Lord?*  
*There, now it's said,*

*It can't be ignored.*

*Cosima Wagner*

YOUNG ELISABETH

*Dear Cosima Wagner,  
Yes, my brother sometimes acts a loon.  
But his love is pure!  
I know you've felt it,  
Seen it in you.  
Won't you return it,  
Making it true?  
(I might vomit soon.)*

*Dear Cosima!  
I fear his heart soon will break.  
Don't turn so cold  
'Cause of one small mistake.*

*Elisabeth Nietzsche*

COSIMA

*Dear 'Lisabeth Nietzsche,  
Know I do not know him anymore.  
This man is mad!  
Whom has he murdered  
But my Lord and God?  
His hands are reddened  
In divine blood.  
Now it's time for war.*

*How can I love?  
When all that's left now is dearth.  
The one I've loved  
Now rots in the earth.*

*Cosima Wagner*

The lights on Cosima's half of the stage dim.

YOUNG ELISABETH

(getting up)

Next time, dearest elder brother, write your own letters.

NIETZSCHE

Where are you going?

YOUNG ELISABETH  
(pauses awkwardly) Friedrich... I have news for you.

NIETZSCHE  
What is it?

YOUNG ELISABETH  
I'm engaged...

She holds up her hand for Nietzsche to see the ring.

NIETZSCHE  
*Engaged?* But to whom and... *HOW?*

YOUNG ELISABETH  
I'm going to Paraguay to be with my husband. We're founding a colony of pure Germans there, in South America.

NIETZSCHE  
(angrily)  
*Bernhard Förster...*

YOUNG ELISABETH  
No, Friedrich! Please don't be upset!

NIETZSCHE  
No, Elisabeth! I won't permit you to marry that man! He deserves nothing but loathing and contempt. How can you possibly love a man who so despises the Jewish race? Might I remind you that we are not pure Germans ourselves!

YOUNG ELISABETH  
Friedrich, I know, I know. But for once, let me do what I want to do. This is my *greatest* opportunity, Friedrich! Can't you understand that? Don't you see that I can't move up as long as you keep me in this wretched house? And, you say that you won't permit me, brother, but I have news for you. I *will* marry him, whether you approve or not. As far as I'm concerned, you're nothing but an enormous hypocrite!

NIETZSCHE  
And you are an unscrupulous witch!

YOUNG ELISABETH  
*Unscrupulous?* This coming from a man who writes of the Superman ushering in an age where people go "beyond good and evil." You listen

up, brother. I've gone more beyond good and evil than any *Superman* ever could.

NIETZSCHE

*GO! Just leave!*

The lights fade and the tune to "Don't Mess with the Woman" plays mournfully as Elisabeth begins to narrate.

ELISABETH

Now my brother had no one... he went to Turin, Italy, for his health. Alone... thinking and raving... all the hopeless contradictions mounting themselves in his mind... what he had sought and what he had not found... what he thought was there and what was not... asking questions that even he had been afraid to ask. And at the time, I didn't know any better. I wasn't there... I might've helped him somehow... before he went completely insane.

A number of streetlights flicker eerily, coming on one at a time to illuminate the nighttime streetscape of Turin, made out of the clutter of the Archive. The lights are tricky, shining what appear to be the soft yellow glow from second-floor windows. Parts of the Archive that would distract from the city-like air are obscured in darkness. A number of townsfolk are relaxing, laughing, drinking, and smoking. Nietzsche is pacing back and forth along the night streets, talking softly to himself, although he cannot be heard. Some of the villagers stop to look at him. Cathedral bells ring out; one villager stops to comment.

**"Castletown Streets"** (Track 18)

ELDERLY VILLAGER

*I hear the bells!  
In the streets of the castletown,  
A hollow kind of ringing.  
They chime out the requiem knell of an age.  
The air here is thick with their toll.*

A local woman turns to another man beside him, pointing to Nietzsche as he leans against a street lamp.

WOMAN

*Who is that man,  
Whose foot rakes the cobblestones?  
He leans against a lamppost.  
His lips move though I cannot hear what he says.  
Perhaps he's not saying a thing.*

The man continues the conversation.

MAN

*What does he think about  
Behind those raving eyes?  
See, he walks about  
Face down; he cries.*

A few other wandering villagers join in the rounds as the couple split and go about their business.

WOMEN

*I saw a man;  
His foot rakes the cobblestones.  
He leans against a lamppost.  
His lips move though I  
Can not hear what he says.  
Perhaps he's not saying a thing.*

MEN

*What does he  
Think about  
Behind those raving eyes?  
See, he  
Walks about  
Face down; he cries.*

Another man stops in the streets to gaze at Nietzsche and think aloud.

MAN

*See there a madman,  
Lonely like rainy streets.  
He hides  
His eyes, his face,  
A brow that compels to thought.*

VILLAGERS

*What does he think about?  
See how he walks about.*

MEN

*What does he  
Think about?  
Behind those raving eyes.  
  
See, he walks about  
  
Face down; he cries.*

WOMEN

*I saw a man;  
His foot rakes the cobblestones.  
He leans against a lamppost.  
  
His lips move though I can not  
Hear what he says.  
Perhaps he's not saying a thing.*

MEN 2

*Is he a  
Madman?  
Or might he be a  
Saint?  
  
Walks in step with  
The bell & the street.  
Looks away.*

VILLAGERS

*I see a man.  
In the streets of the castletown.  
Although he stands in lamplight  
His presence is such that it darkens the air.  
Perhaps we should leave him alone.*

The villagers go about their ways, leaving Nietzsche alone to rant to himself.

NIETZSCHE

They left me...left me alone... Elisabeth and Cosima and... it's all wrong, something's not right, not right at all... I... what's wrong with me? Why do I feel this way... I'm weak... a weak fool... I'm pathetic...

An old nun approaches. She is grandmotherly, and she carries a basket as she shuffles down the street. She notices Nietzsche, cradling his head in his hand and mumbling incoherently to himself. She cocks her head and approaches him.

NUN

Young man, is there something wrong?

NIETZSCHE

(suddenly noticing her)

Hmm?

NUN

Is something the matter? You look lost...

NIETZSCHE

I... no—no... I'm fine. I... don't worry about me...

NUN

I'm terribly sorry... it's just you remind me of my nephew, somehow... forgive me... I'm just a silly old woman.

NIETZSCHE

It's all right... I... I was just out for a... walk...

The old woman comes up to him and starts to babble. It is obvious that she is not going away.

NUN

You know, I was just praying for the Lord to send me some lost soul... someone alone and miserable in need of a warm place to stay... when I saw you I guess I thought my prayers were answered.

NIETZSCHE

(laughingly)

Lost soul... what soul... there's nothing. Nothing at all.

NUN

Nonsense. We are made in the image of God.

NIETZSCHE

Then we are made in the image of a corpse.

NUN

How horrible it must be for you... to have no hope... poor child...

NIETZSCHE

Please... I don't want your pity... or your mind-numbing religion and its sickening morality. It is your *rights* and *wrongs* that hold humanity back you know. Hold us back... hold me back. Make us weak. Powerless...

NUN

Are you alone, young man? Have you anyone in the world to go to?

NIETZSCHE

(irritated)

Yes, I have someone to go to... I'm here with friends, in fact. I'm just walking... I find the atmosphere of the streets... good for thinking.

NUN

What do you think about... all alone, in the dark, rainy streets?

NIETZSCHE

Mostly about how people like you are stuck in your silly sentimentalities and refuse to come to reason. God is dead and so is morality... people are...*blind*. They've killed God but they think can keep the rights and wrongs around because it makes them feel good... such thinking is backwards and life-negating. We must be done with morality and weakness... and pave the way for will-to-power and a new, higher person... we must ask the tough questions. And dare to stare into the abyss that surrounds us... because there's *nothing* beyond God. Nothing but what we make ourselves. And it will be a glorious nothing...

NUN

May I pray for you?

NIETZSCHE

...Pray for me?

NUN

I hear you... and my heart goes out to you. Let me say a prayer...

NIETZSCHE

I don't need your prayers.

NUN

(she touches him on the shoulder as she begins to drone)  
Almighty heavenly Father I come to you in the name of your holy and  
precious son...

NIETZSCHE

Stop... please...

NUN

Reveal to him your mercy and infinite love... take him into your care...  
forgive him his sins...

NIETZSCHE

No... I don't— please, stop this...

NUN

For Thine is the kingdom...

Nietzsche suddenly grabs the nun's rosary and tosses it to the ground, stepping on it  
violently.

NIETZSCHE

(shouting)

Stop! Leave me! Your God is dead and I want none of this! None!

His outburst is sudden, and frightens the poor woman. She scurries away, scared, as  
Nietzsche continues to scream out into the night.

NIETZSCHE

You hear me? None! None of it! I don't want your love... I don't want  
your righteous... I want to be left alone... (sinks to his knees) I want... I  
want... I'm... leave me...

As Nietzsche starts going insane, a man enters, leading his horse into the room... however  
he stops short, the reins leading out of the door. He struggles to pull the horse in, but it's  
too stubborn. A shadow, outlined in yellow light against the wall, reveals the shape of  
the horse's head. (This could perhaps be accomplished with the rocking horse used  
earlier.)

MAN

Come on, blast it, you can't get all stubborn on me now. We're almost  
there.

Nietzsche watches in silence as the man's horse refuses to come.

MAN

(shaking the horse's reigns)  
Come on! Come on! All right, then, if you won't cooperate I'll just have to use force!

He pulls out a vicious looking whip. The shadow of the horse's face shakes in refusal.

MAN  
I'm giving you one last chance to cooperate!

The horse doesn't budge.

MAN  
So, that's the way you want it!

He takes the whip and begins to lash the horse. The horse whinnies in pain. He whips it *over and over and over*, the shadow of the horse's head reacting, moving up and down. It's animal cries grow louder and more shrill. The man starts to laugh.

MAN  
A horse that won't cooperate is no better than a dead one!

He takes the whip and continues to lash. Nietzsche, infuriated, stumbles up to him.

NIETZSCHE  
Stop!

He grabs the man's arm but Nietzsche is flung weakly away. He falls into a pile on the street.

MAN  
How dare you come between me and my property! This horse belongs to me and I do as I like with it!

NIETZSCHE  
(weakly, coughing)  
Can't you see the animal's pain...

MAN  
Animals don't feel pain.

He starts whipping the horse again, to Nietzsche horror. The philosopher stumbles to his feet.

NIETZSCHE  
No, stop!

MAN

I'm the master and I'll beat it if I like! Who are you to tell me what's right and wrong? I'll beat it to death if I want!

He returns to whipping the poor animal, almost with a sadistic fervor. Nietzsche begins to walk, weakly, dragging an injured leg, over to the horse.

NIETZSCHE

No... that isn't how it works... no! That's not how it works! You can't just beat it like that! It's *wrong*!

At this, he throws himself onto the man, knocking him away for a moment so he can stagger toward the horse, but he falls to the ground before he makes it. Realizing that Nietzsche may be dying, the man stops whipping, and turns to call for help.

MAN

Someone! Help! Someone get a doctor!

The lights fade as Nietzsche passes out in the streets. We hear the sound of a bomber jet passing overhead. In the darkness, there is the faint sound of a machine gun, and then, the lights come up again, over the bed. Nietzsche awakens inside it. He moans softly. After a moment, voices can be heard from offstage, distant and distorted.

WOMAN (v/o)

I put him in bed. He looks terrible.

LANDLORD (v/o)

I've sent notice to his family. I'm afraid that's all we can do for now. Go get some rest.

WOMAN (v/o)

Yes, of course...

We hear footsteps as the two go their own ways. Nietzsche is left alone. He moans again and pulls off the covers, hobbling to his feet.

NIETZSCHE

What have I done?

He looks around for the time, trying to get some idea of how long he's been out. However, there is no clock in the room. He stumbles around a bit.

NIETZSCHE

The horse... he was whipping the horse and I... it makes no sense... he... said something. No — No one should have the right to whip... and... cause so much pain to any creature...

He runs his hands through his wild, uncombed hair.

#### NIETZSCHE

Now I gingerly place a toe over into the abyss... do I dare to question... me? No! The truths are too powerful! Too obvious... I saw them, understood them as plain as day! This isn't what they were supposed to lead to! I'm tearing myself apart... my weakness... I thought... that if man could only rise above morality and set the rules for himself... life would be so beautiful. But instead... there's only hurt and death and darkness. I look at myself as I stand at the brink and ask "What is it that's beyond good and evil that I wanted so badly? And how do I know that it's really there?" But no one answers. Because in the abyss there's nothing but darkness. And now... I start to wonder... if the Superman can bring anything at all, except... pain and suffering. No! No... there's always Dionysus! Dionysus, who called to me so clearly all those years ago. Dionysus will always live! And he calls me even now, from the abyss. "Come on in," he says. "Take a blind leap." Those pleasures... those pleasures that he showed me... entice me even now. There can be no turning back. I was not wrong then and I am not wrong now. Maybe there will be pain and suffering when the Superman comes. But it will be Apollo's! Cosima! I haven't lost you yet! Now, Dionysus! There's no one left but you and me! Come! Live in me! Show me the truths that lie beyond the abyss! Show me the pleasures in a world without good and evil! Show me the wild living! Live in me, Dionysus! Let me live in you!

At this, he goes completely over the brink. He's mad now, and there's no going back. Laughing, he throws off his coat and his glasses. He rips his shirt open to expose his bare chest. A piano begins playing mad, broken dischords as the lights go off. Nietzsche continues to laugh hysterically even in the darkness... his laughs begin to take on an echoing quality before finally, he stops.

#### ELISABETH

They took him to an asylum... my brother was committed to an institution. When mother found out she took him home immediately... they sent word to me in Paraguay. My husband had died... tragically... and there was little money left. I came home, with news of a sudden increase in my brother's popularity... the Germans had started reading his books... and with it, a new idea sparked inside of me... I hurried home as quickly as possible. Mother was spending all her energy caring for my brother. His mind was completely gone... he would lay in bed, his eyes moving around as if in a dream, or a nightmare. Mother would talk to him, try to soothe him and pray to God that he could hear her. She never knew what he was thinking. No one ever knew.

The lights come up in the bedroom area again. Nietzsche is in bed again, his mind almost completely left him. He lays under the covers, unmoving. Franzizka comes in with a tray of soup for him. She pulls up a chair next to him and begins to spoon the food into his mouth.

FRANZIZKA

There now... eat up, yes. There.

He says nothing, only moving his eyes in weird directions, as if in a seizure.

FRANZIZKA

Friedrich... I still love you, even if you're so sick now. I hope you haven't forgotten that, Friedrich. It seems every time I see you you're in some kind of bad position or other. You still remember that night... the night your father died? I never told you how he died, I figured it would upset you too much. If I had let you see him, Friedrich... oh, it was just horrible. He went mad, Friedrich. He wasn't the same person, anymore. He loved the Emperor so much and when he let those revolutionaries have their way... he thought he had been betrayed. I know you were probably too young then to remember, but I think you ought to know.

She sets the tray down on a nearby table, the food gone. She then returns to her chair.

FRANZIZKA

You were always so quiet as a boy, Friedrich. You would run over to your grandfather's and read and read and read. It's no wonder everyone called you a little minister. You were so smart. You were going to grow up to be just like your father. In a way... they were right... But I don't want to think about that, Friedrich. When you started writing those books... all those new ideas of yours... I wanted to believe that you really didn't believe in those things... that you were being forced to somehow... but I couldn't help feeling that you turned your back on your father... and on me. You should never have done that, Friedrich. We still love you. I love you. God loves you. He promises he will always love you, no matter what you say against him, so long as you want to come back to him. Please come back to him, Friedrich. His arms are always open. Please come back to *me*. Love is infinite, Friedrich. I'm surprised that... in all these writings, in all these great books you wrote... you never said that. You never realized that. I wish I had sat down to read them more thoroughly. Your Zarathustra is hard reading. You write so beautifully. But... why must you write such horrible things? What is it about love that frightens you so much, Friedrich? Why can't you accept it? Why does it seem so low and inhuman to you? Humanity without love... is a monster, Friedrich. I know you are not incapable of love, Friedrich, and even then, that's not what love means. Why is the idea of loving someone without asking a thing in return so repulsive to you? I wish I could understand

what was going on in that head... I wish you would say something. I wish I had been there sooner. If I had said something, done something different... if I had been a better mother you wouldn't have ended up this way.

She grabs Nietzsche's cold, extended hand and begins to sing softly the lullaby she used to sing to him as a child.

**"A Mother's Love (Reprise)" (Track 19)**

FRANZIZKA

*Dear God, please hear my prayer.  
Take my son in your care.  
Help him turn you his eyes!  
Help me show him your light.  
I know my son has done wrong.  
And I know your justice is strong.  
But a mother's love  
Can make this all right.*

*Dear Lord, what did he do  
That he should never see you?  
Your love reigns everlasting!  
Sin can only seem slight.  
He'll turn back should he see  
Your love living in me.  
A mother's love  
Will make this all right.*

*Though he says you are dead,  
You rose after you bled,  
From the grave, he can rise from the bed!*

*Dear Lord, I am to blame.  
Are a mother and child not the same?  
Please, God, don't take my baby!  
You're only punishing me!*

At this, Young Fritz, as a ghost, appears at her side. Franzizka notices him, and stands up. Without saying a word, she approaches him, and taking his hand, they begin to dance together, to the rising tune of "Little Minister's Child." The music nearing an end, Fritz notions for his mother to come with him, but she hesitates, and goes back to Friedrich on the bed.

*Dear Lord, I love my son.  
I know his soul can be won.  
Take his sins to the cross!*

*Shine, make everything bright!  
Clothe my son in your love.  
Bathe him in tears from above.  
A mother's love  
Has made this all right.*

Young Fritz beckons more insistently, and Franziska rises up and goes to him, leaving Friedrich all alone. Softly, he begins to sing to himself.

NIETZSCHE

*Fly home  
Mama bird, home!  
Mama bird, please don't leave...  
Don't leave me alone.  
Mama bird... home...  
Please... don't leave...*

He pauses, shivering a bit, as if freezing, before suddenly crying out.

NIETZSCHE

NO! NO! I'M NOT WRONG!

The light suddenly comes up a bit, revealing Elisabeth at the door. She is disheveled. She comes up to her brother lying on the bed.

YOUNG ELISABETH

Friedrich... Friedrich?

He makes no reply.

YOUNG ELISABETH

Friedrich... mother's dead. Friedrich, can you understand me?

She sits down on the chair and starts crying, leaning her head on him.

YOUNG ELISABETH

Don't you care, Friedrich? Doesn't it mean anything to you?

NIETZSCHE

(mumbling incoherently)

Cosima... no... Cosima...

YOUNG ELISABETH

Shut up about your stupid Cosima! You're a sick, heartless, old fool!  
How can you be so... so cold?

She wipes her eyes as the lights fade to black.

ELISABETH

I took him with me here to Weimar, with the intent of building a shrine to him... a monument... my Archive. An eternal testament to my brother's philosophy and new morality. And the elite of Germany would come to me, as they had come to Wagner and Cosima all those years before. They would come and kiss my hand. Royalty would come. And I did. They all came. Came to see me. Success at last! It was mine... The top of the social ladder was in view! The world beyond good and evil was at my fingertips and it was absolutely glorious! Did you know that the Fuhrer himself came to the Archive?

ERNST

You told me.

ELISABETH

My brother... he never got what he wanted. He died ten excruciating years after his collapse... never once did he find what he was looking for outside that little church in the village. I found it. Oh, how I found it... He might have told you there was nothing but a vast abyss in the beyond... but if he had had true courage he would have seen the glory and power that was there for the taking. He always looked down... he should've looked up, and climbed with me. We held an impressive funeral for him... the new philosopher hero of Germany! A requiem mass not only for him, but for the age of Christian stupor we left behind.

The lights come up to reveal a coffin, open. The lights are dim, and the stained-glass light is shining down upon it. Nietzsche enters, quietly, as an organ hums in the background. The lights are eerie, to suggest a vision sequence. Nietzsche approaches the coffin, and looks about the room, as the organ music begins to build. He stands in the light of the stained glass window and looks up, shaking his fist at the God it was built for.

**“The Fall of God”** (Track 21)

NIETZSCHE

*And so I'm standing in the house of God.  
The cloth is dusty and the wood is worn.  
And yet I wonder why there's no one here.  
Now God is dead and there's no one to mourn.*

*Why have you cursed me so I understand  
The truths and beauties of the sinful ways  
Yet at the same time I feel right and wrong  
I feel the guilt beneath my father's gaze.*

*So now the war is on.*

*You and my will to sin.  
It's down to you and me  
And I will win.*

There is a low, trembling sound, like an earthquake. The organ and choir music builds to a dramatic crescendo. The room turns a ghastly red. (If it can be done, it would be nice to suggest a falling cathedral here, perhaps with flames or falling rocks or something.)

*All that I want-  
-ed was to be with her  
And use her, be one with her  
But you cursed her  
You poisoned her mind.  
And so I'll fight  
Your great injustices  
I'll get what I want  
And take what is mine!*

*For I know that truth is desire!  
I know that now hell has lost its fire!*

*I'll fight you  
I'll wrestle you  
And I'll even kill you  
If only  
To quench my desires.*

*The fall of God.  
And from His ashes will  
Arise forth the Superman!*

*He'll tell me what I want to hear!  
He'll lend a more sympathetic ear!*

*He'll let me do what I want...  
That's what it's really all about...*

He falls to his knees, alongside the coffin. We hear eerie chanting from offstage... the chanting of the funeral procession. He crawls into the coffin and closes it on himself, with an echoing clang. The procession enters, some of them with candles. They circle about the coffin and begin to sing. Elisabeth is with them.

### **“Requiem for an Age”**

#### FUNERAL PROCESSION

*You showed us the road to Dionysus.  
You showed the truth on your page.*

*You taught the words of a song  
The Requiem for an Age. (for an Age)*

*The bells of the church now ring hollow  
You set us free from our cage  
We've gone beyond right and wrong  
A Requiem for an Age (for an Age)*

*Oh-oh-oh (repeat)*

*Now we must convert your words to action;  
That newfound war we must wage  
Will put the great in their place  
A Requiem for an Age (for an Age)*

*Oh-oh-oh (repeat)*

Some men take the coffin and carry it away, as the procession chants and follows.

ELISABETH

We buried him... we didn't need him... he'd served his purpose and written what had to be written. And it's all true, every word. I'm the *living* proof of its truth. Of the greatness of those words... of their final culmination. Of their infinite truth and beauty... And now, look at me... *look at me...*

She grabs Ernst by the arm and pulls him close to her. He stares at her hideous, wrinkled face in horror.

ELISABETH

(almost to the point of insanity)

A great woman... a great woman... *look at me...* I've spoken to Hitler! I've eaten with him! I am the First Lady of Europe! The greatest woman! I am *great! GREAT! A GREAT WOMAN!*

Ernst backs up, but Elisabeth has clutched onto him. She falls from the chair, on the floor, writhing and screaming.

ELISABETH

*Kiss my hand! I AM great! Great! Great! Kiss me...*

ERNST

Oh, God, help me—

The attendants rush in, and pry her fingers from the biographer. She screams, babbling and foaming, as they take her from the room, holding her bony, decayed body down to prevent struggling. The radio comes on of its own accord, and we hear war sounds...

machine guns, planes, explosions... staticky and distorted. We hear the marching and chanting of the Nazis as the curtain falls, with Ernst looking out towards the door where Elisabeth had been taken.