

1.3.

Exit Salome with Heinrich. Nietzsche walks to the window and watches them go. He then returns excitedly downstage towards Rée.

NIETZ: (*Beat*) I flirted with her! I found myself flirting with her before I could stop myself! I mean, I could feel myself flirting, and I thought 'stop this, you idiot', but I couldn't – it was far too enjoyable!

REE: There: I told you! She has that effect: she draws you in.

NIETZ: But that in itself is an interesting experience, is it not: to be out of control, witness oneself in free-fall, looking over the edge – and jumping - a happy suicide.

REE: Steady on, Fritz.

NIETZ: Why? Why should I deny it? All my instincts tell me: she's perfect. And she *is* lovely.

REE: I told you.

NIETZ: More than lovely! You were right... madness of course, but why shouldn't it work? Well, I can give you a thousand reasons right off the top of my head: there's her mother to start with. I mean, she says she has a bit of money, but what will her father think when she moves in with three men. No, it's madness – but it could work; it *will* work.

REE: You see! That's what I like about Lou.

NIETZ: What?

REE: Men start talking to themselves after just one visit.

NIETZ: You're right. I'm being absurd. Utterly absurd. What on earth's the matter with me?

REE: Ah, man is so made that he can resist sound argument, yet yield to a glance, et cetera, et cetera..

NIETZ: Yes, I *have* yielded – without even knowing my opponent...

REE: And that, my dear friend - is love.

NIETZ: Love? Or weakness?

REE: Not weakness: softness.

NIETZ: But survival demands hardness. Still, I confess something in me ... (*Pause*) Why does it have to be a woman?

REE: Why does *what* have to be a woman?

NIETZ: That we love. Not that I love Miss Salome, of course; I'm not suggesting anything of the like; but why, where the purest form of love is concerned - and if sexual attraction can be dismissed ---

REE: (*laughing*) Which it can't.

NIETZ: Why does it have to be a woman? What is it that we find in a woman that we don't - can't find in a man? Why do we have to love a woman? What does she give us?

REE: A softness. Woman softens the world for us.

NIETZ: But can't we men do that for each other? Doesn't friendship soften the world?

REE: Not in the same way. Women...draw out our own softness - because they're vulnerable, physically at any rate.

NIETZ: So we only love that which is vulnerable?

REE: They make us gentle: - 'gentlemen'.

NIETZ: Gentle - the opposite of heroic...

REE: Not if we protect them with our lives!

NIETZ: Then we act only with a woman's weakness in mind. I don't believe.... I don't quite know...what to believe.

REE: You don't have to know, Fritz; just have faith.

NIETZ: Like a religious fanatic, you mean.

REE: A devotee of love. Even Socrates was married: don't forget that.

NIETZ: Much good it did him - or her.

REE: Characterful wench, so they say! Kept her end up, in argument, I mean, though they did have children too, it can be done: philosophers can be lovers!

NIETZ: And yet it was his muse who came to him on his deathbed: make more music, she said. Just think: as you lie dying you realise you've neglected something as vital as music – and for what? A life of logic and morals.

REE: Better late than never.

NIETZ: Maybe. Maybe not. But yes, it took nerve to admit it. Paradox is a sign of fruitfulness, don't you think? Logic is sterile.

REE: In the wrong hands.

NIETZ: To which it is somehow always mysteriously drawn!

REE: All the more reason to love, then.

NIETZ: Yes, what could be less logical! (*Beat*) Her eyes are her best quality, I'd say, wouldn't you?

REE: Yes, that and her nose and mouth and ---

NIETZ: Her mere presence quickens something in me.

REE: Your heart, Friedrich...

NIETZ: Why would it need quickening? Maybe I've been dead. Maybe I've been asleep for centuries... Listen to me! I sound like a fairy tale! I hardly know the girl! Absurd. But then how long does it take to find yourself in deep sympathy with someone, to know you're in perfect step?

REE: A second: the time it takes to exchange a smile.

NIETZ: Yes... her laugh has a kind of music, don't you think? It rises and falls: if I were being pretentious -

REE: Which you are ---

NIETZ: I'd say it was like, I don't know – a Chopin prelude. There I go again! I know I'm being absurd - is it absurd?

REE: Fritz, you're using the word 'absurd' rather a lot, which is a sure sign –

NIETZ: Of what?

REE: The onset of love - which *is* absurd – and profoundly real – at the same time.

NIETZ: It doesn't have to be absurd. It doesn't have to be... anyway, I can't believe you're even using the word 'love', Rée: what's got into you: I've just met a perfectly pleasant young woman with whom I've exchanged some interesting ideas --- (*turns towards sound of Rée snoring*) - *It isn't* a love affair: I don't want that, I won't have that. Romance is absurd.