

(The dance swirls around our three principals: MOTHER, TATEH and COALHOUSE, increasing in intensity. BLACKS, WHITES and IMMIGRANTS find themselves in moments of contact or confrontation; there is the potential for violence.)

ALL  
AND THERE WAS DISTANT MUSIC  
SKIPPING A BEAT, SINGING A DREAM.

WOMEN  
LA LA LA LA LA

ALL  
A STRANGE, INSISTENT MUSIC  
PUTTING OUT HEAT  
PICKING UP STEAM.

MEN-  
LA LA LA LA LA

ALL  
THE SOUND OF DISTANT THUNDER  
SUDDENLY STARTING TO CLIMB...

IT WAS THE MUSIC  
OF SOMETHING BEGINNING,  
AN ERA EXPLODING,  
A CENTURY SPINNING  
IN RICHES AND RAGS,  
AND IN RHYTHM AND RHYME.  
THE PEOPLE CALLED IT RAGTIME...  
RAGTIME... (RAGTIME)  
RAGTIME... (RAGTIME)  
RAGTIME... (RAGTIME, RAGTIME!)

(We hear the stentorian blasts of an ocean-going steam vessel. We are on the main deck of the ship that will be carrying FATHER on an expedition to the North Pole with ADMIRAL PEARY.)

FATHER is bidding goodbye to his FAMILY. They have all gathered to see him off. Various ship personnel, their families and an historical society mill about the pier below.)

FATHER  
Everything will be fine, Mother. You'd think the world was coming to an end every time a man sailed off to the North Pole with Admiral Peary.

**FATHER!**

**START**

MOTHER

I shall miss you.

FATHER

Of course you will. But it's only a year. Nothing much happens in a year. The world will not spin off its axis. Nothing will change, Mother. We will miss each other but the world will stay the same.

(FATHER turns to THE LITTLE BOY.)

You're the man of the house now. You have to keep an eye on Mother for both of us. Will you do that?

LITTLE BOY

Yes, sir.

FATHER

That's my little soldier.

**END**

GRANDFATHER

I want to go now. My legs hurt. Everyone say goodbye.

(GRANDFATHER and THE LITTLE BOY start to go.)

FATHER

I'll miss you, sir.

GRANDFATHER

Then stay home

(THEY are gone.)

MOTHER

Come back soon and safe to us.

FATHER

That is my intention.

MOTHER

And not too many polar bear skins.

FATHER

I promise. Now unless you want to be the only woman left on a shipful of men, you'd better get ashore.

(This is FATHER's idea of a joke.)

I'm sorry. That was coarse. Goodbye.

(He kisses her.)

Stay well. God bless you.

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