

# **EASTLAND: A MUSICAL EVENT**

**BOOK AND LYRICS BY  
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**MUSIC BY  
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**SHOW PERUSAL**



**EASTLAND  
DISASTER  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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Eastland: A Musical Event

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## CAST

### Woman 1

BOBBIE AANSTAD – a 14-year-old girl  
MUSICIAN 1

### Woman 2

MARIANNE AANSTAD – Bobbie’s mother, Norwegian immigrant, 45  
FACTORY WOMAN  
MIDWIFE  
HELEN FISHER  
GRANDMOTHER of William Novotny

### Woman 3

SOLVEIG AANSTAD – Bobbie’s younger sister, 11  
FACTORY WOMAN  
TRAIN CONDUCTOR  
MESSENGER  
ANNA KOLAR  
MUSICIAN 2

### Woman 4

ILSE – a woman in her early 30s

### Woman 5

ILSE’s SISTER – a 25-year-old woman  
FACTORY WOMAN, 35  
KATHARINE DUBECK, 18  
MUSICIAN 3

### Man 1

PEDERSEN – Captain of the S.S. Eastland, 65  
MUSICIAN 4

### Man 2

ERICKSON – Chief Engineer of the Eastland, 30  
GROCER, late 20s  
JOSEPH BETLACK  
MUSICIAN 5

### Man 3

OAKLEY  
And OTHERS  
MUSICIAN 6

### Man 4

OLAF AANSTAD – Bobbie’s Norwegian Uncle at 45, then 40  
OTTO MUCHNA, Undertaker, 45

**Man 5**

REGGIE BOWLES – 17  
WELDER

**Man 6**

HUSBAND – factory worker, 30  
HOUDINI, 40  
HENRY CZESKA  
ATTORNEY  
MUSICIAN 7

**Man 7**

BOBBIE'S FATHER – Norwegian, 30  
FIREMAN, Chicago Fire Department, 30  
JOHN SCHMIDT, Train Conductor  
MUSICIAN 8

INSTRUMENTS

The 2012 Lookingglass production featured guitars, banjo, violin, piano, accordion, and upright bass.

SYNOPSIS

On the morning of July 24, 1915, 2500 passengers board the *S. S. Eastland* for a day's excursion across Lake Michigan. Factory workers and their families, they are looking forward to a day outside in the sun with picnics, games, and parades. But before the boat can even cast off, it tips slowly onto its side and settles into the mud, and within minutes, more than 800 are dead, drowned, or crushed in the ensuing melee.

EASTLAND interlaces the stories of three figures (BOBBIE, ILSE, and REGGIE) caught in this forgotten tragedy – the biggest manmade mortality event on American soil prior to September 11, 2001 – as they spend their hours waiting for rescue or death.

The “present” of this play takes place on the morning of July 24, 1915, with the three primary characters – BOBBIE, ILSE, and REGGIE – trapped or swimming under the *S.S. Eastland*. While under the boat, all three characters reflect on significant events in their past, as well as those that led up to the boat's fateful tipping over, which takes the action to various locations and events of the period.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The play is almost entirely sung-through, and lyrics are in *italics*. In those sections where there is overlapping dialogue or lyrics, text is separated into two columns.

Additionally, the play is written to be told by actors who play multiple roles including Musicians, who serve as storytellers. This is why there are instances when some are referred to as Musician One, Musician Two, etc. This was successful in its previous production, but is only a suggestion from the author.

SONG LIST

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. A Summoning                 | The Company  |
| 2. Everything We've Never Seen | Bobbie, Marianne, Olaf, & The Company                                    |
| 3. Ilse Part One               | Ilse, Sister, Factory Women, the Husband                                 |
| 4. Reggie One                  | Reggie, Houdini  |
| 5. Ilse Part Two               | Ilse, Midwife, Husband, Factory Women, Grocer, Storyteller & The Company |
| 6. Into The River              | The Company  |
| 7. Reggie Two                  | Reggie, Houdini, Fireman & The Company                                   |
| 8. Ilse Part Three             | Ilse, Grocer, Husband, Messenger, & The Company                          |
| 9. Undertaker's Lament         | Otto & The Company   |
| 10. Parade of Souls            | The Company  |
| 11. It's Complicated           | Pedersen & The Company   |
| 12. Be The Leaf Not The Stone  | Bobbie, Bobbie's Father, Olaf & The Company                              |
| 13. Reggie Three               | Reggie, Houdini, Fireman, Otto & The Company                             |
| 14. Houdini's Waltz            | Reggie, Houdini & The Company  |
| 15. Ilse Part Four             | Ilse, Otto, Grocer & The Company   |
| 16. A Small Mystery            | Grandmother, Otto & The Company  |
| 17. Only The River Remains     | The Company  |

**EASTLAND: A NEW MUSICAL**

*ACTORS enter and take their places, tune their instruments, acknowledge the audience. Beat. They begin.*

**MUSIC: #1 A SUMMONING**<< **TRACK 1** >>

MUSICIAN 4

*There were clouds**And there was rain**And a little sunlight too**There was music*

MUSICIAN 4, MUSICIAN 6 AND BOBBIE

*There were voices*

MUSICIAN 4

*There was still so much to do**There was boredom**And excitement And a**lot of in between*

SOLVEIG

*It was perfect*

OTTO

*It was awful.*

EVERYONE

*Everything we've never seen.*

REGGIE

*There was water**There was sky*

BOBBIE

*And the sun beat on the sand*

SOLVEIG

*Perfect sunlight*

SOLVEIG AND ILSE

*Total darkness*

ILSE

*And his hand upon my hand*

GROCER

*She made me laugh*

MARIANNE

*He made me cry*

SISTER

*Another day, another fight*

BOBBIE

*There were butterflies*

BOBBIE AND SOLVEIG AND ILSE

*And fireflies!*

*Extraordinary light*

(BRIDGE)

MUSICIAN 4, BOBBIE, SOLVEIG AND ILSE

*There was all of this*

*And more and yet...*

MUSICIANS 4 & 5, BOBBIE, SOLVEIG, ILSE

*It doesn't take too long*

*Before all of us forget.*

MUSICIAN 4

*How do we know*

*We've made a mark*

*On the page?*

*On someone's heart?*

MUSICIANS 2, 3, 4 & 6

*Do you write it?*

*Or carve it ?*

*Or burn it in blood?*

*How can we be sure*

EVERYONE

*It don't just end up in the mud?*

MUSICIANS 2, 3, 4 & 6

*How do you ask a river*

*To even know you're there?*

EVERYONE

*'Cuz The River's always movin'*

*Why should it even care?*



BOBBIE  
*I was hopeful*

ILSE  
*I was scared*

MARIANNE  
*I just didn't know*

EVERYONE  
*There was tipping*  
*There was leaning*  
*Holding on and letting go*

OLAF  
*It was a blink*  
*That took forever*

REGGIE  
*It was over much too fast.*

MUSICIAN 4  
*The clawing and the hammering*

EVERYONE  
*And the quiet came, at last...*

*(Very LARGE sound of the boat tipping, then sudden quiet and darkness. An echoing silence, a compressed, under-the-hull soundscape. Then BOBBIE sputtering, gasping, comes up for air.)*

**MUSIC 2: EVERYTHING WE'VE NEVER SEEN**

**<< TRACK 2 >>**

BOBBIE  
*(comes up gasping)*  
Help!  
*(silence)*  
Hello?  
*(silence)*

*She looks around, treading water.*

Where...*(am I)?* Where...*(is this)?*  
*(sudden realization)*  
My hat! Where is my...?  
I...I was...  
I was just noticing

How pretty Mama's hair was,  
 Swept up, all those pins,  
 And we tip just a bit  
 And the big huge clock  
 Almost seven-thirty  
 Uncle Olaf frowns  
 Like he smells something funny  
 And we tip a bit more  
 And Solveig looks up  
 To make sure we're okay  
 So I start to tell mama  
 That she looks like a queen  
 And I'm about to tell her  
 When the boat starts to lean  
 And I...  
 And I...  
 I...

*SOUND OF BOAT LEANING –perhaps it's adjusting in the mud, perhaps  
 it's her memory of the sounds before it tipped – either way it's scary and stops her.*

*The SOUND settles, BOBBIE starts again.*

*(calls out)* Hello?...  
 I was...  
*(losing it a little)* Oh, where is my hat???  
*(regaining, determined)* I was...  
 I was putting on my underthings  
 Still dark outside the window  
 But we have to get up early  
 If we want to be on time  
 Mama?... Uncle Olaf?...  
 Oh where are they?...  
 Mama had filled the basin So  
 we could wash up proper And  
 I put my whole face in Just  
 to let the cool, clear water  
 Calm me down, calm me down

MARIANNE

*(Calling)* Bobbie! Are you dressed yet?

BOBBIE

*(slight beat)*

And I saw my own reflection  
 Water dripping from my chin  
 And I smiled and told myself

To let the day begin  
*(spoken at first, then tentative singing)*  
 They said there'll be...  
*They said there'll be everything*  
*I've never seen*  
*And everything only a boat ride away*

*Everything I've never seen*  
*And everything only a boat ride away*  
*Everything I've never seen*  
  
*And all of this only a boat ride away*

MARIANNE  
*There'll be everything you've never seen*

*The games and the parade*  
*Tilting matches in the water*  
*Then picnic in the shade*  
*"Bloomer girls" and tug of war*  
*So much you've never seen before*  
*And all this just a boat ride away*

BOBBIE  
 But what if on the boat  
 I really have to go?

MARIANNE  
 Go now.

*Lights up on MUSICIANS, who step forward as PEDERSEN and ERICKSON*

PEDERSEN  
 Erickson!

ERICKSON  
 Captain Pedersen, sir.

PEDERSEN  
 D'you fill her up?

ERICKSON  
 Yes sir, finished around 3 a.m. 104 tons total. That's a lot of coal, sir.

PEDERSEN  
 We'll need it. It's more'n 400 miles before we get another chance to load up.

ERICKSON  
 Anyway, it's good ballast.

PEDERSEN  
 I'm going to breakfast, then I'll have another look at the charts.

BOBBIE  
*And now the dress I got for Easter*  
*And the hat with paper flowers*  
*And the coffee in the kitchen*  
*Smells of eggs, it will be hours 'Till*  
*we're finally on the boat*

*Then still more hours 'till the park,  
Then coming home long after dark!  
But...*

MARIANNE AND BOBBIE  
Breakfast!

BOBBIE  
Mama calls  
And I go down the stairs  
Uncle Olaf at the mirror  
Solveig in her chair  
Cold milk inside the pitcher  
But I won't have much to drink  
I don't want to have to go  
While we're on the boat;  
I think I have it in my hand  
But it slips; milk splatters It  
wobbles on the table Then  
drops, then shatters

MARIANNE  
Bobbie!  
You're too old for that  
Here's a rag for the milk  
You'll clean the rest when we get back

BOBBIE  
*Then Olaf checks the angle  
Of his hat just once more  
Then one more trip to pee  
Then together out the door  
I wish I hadn't worn this sweater  
I thought it would be colder And  
I wish it was Papa's hand  
Instead of Olaf's on my shoulder.*  
The four of us set out  
As the sky begins to lighten  
The air smells of something  
Smoke? Rain? No, not quite...

*Lights up on PEDERSEN on the bridge.*

PEDERSEN  
Oakley!

*Another MUSICIAN steps out as OAKLEY.*

OAKLEY

Sir!

PEDERSEN

I want you out there counting passengers as they board. They raised the limit, so we're expecting more than last year -- I don't want any trouble. *(goes to leave)*

OAKLEY

No sir. Boat's shifty enough as it is.

PEDERSEN

*(sharp)* The hell you mean by that?

OAKLEY

Nothing, sir. Only everyone knows it's a little tender.

PEDERSEN

Just stick to your job, Oakley, and mind the counter.

OAKLEY

Yes, sir.

*Lights out on PEDERSEN and OAKLEY, back up on BOBBIE and SOLVEIG.*

BOBBIE

*Then onto the streetcar The  
clatter and the clanging  
The clapping of the horses  
The scraping and the banging*

TRAIN CONDUCTOR (DOUG)

Clark Street, this is Clark Street!

BOBBIE

*And Solveig can't stop jiggling  
We're close, I can tell  
I can't see the river  
But boy, I can smell it  
And soon we'll be out  
On the lake, with fresh air.  
And then, at last,  
We'll finally be there*

SOLVEIG AND OLAF

*There'll be  
Everything*

*Everything  
I've never seen*

*I've never seen  
And everything only a boat ride away*

*And all of this only a boat ride away*

MARIANNE AND BOBBIE

*There'll be  
Everything I've never seen  
The races and the rides!  
A real roller coaster!*

*A carousel besides  
All the ice cream you can eat  
Cotton candy as an extra treat And  
all of this only a boat ride away.*

BOBBIE

But what if I get sick?  
And what if I have to,  
Oh I will, I just know  
What if on the boat  
I suddenly have to go?

MARIANNE

You'll be fine, ya?

*Lights up on PEDERSEN and ERICKSON*

PEDERSEN

Keep us steady today, Erickson. They don't get out on the lake much, they'll want a nice smooth ride.

ERICKSON

Yes, sir. Western Electric?

PEDERSEN

Same as last year. Just a whole lot more of 'em.

ERIKSON

Be a damn shame if they get rained out.

PEDERSEN

Just a little morning rain. Should burn off by noon.

ERIKSON

Yes, Sir.

PEDERSEN

All the same, just keep us steady. Don't want people slippin' all over the deck. *(looks at the crowd)* Goddamn. Look at all of 'em. And it ain't even seven o'clock.

*Lights back up on BOBBIE.*

BOBBIE

*Back in the current  
Pulled in by this river*

*Of hats and umbrellas*

ERIKSON

...That's twelve sixty-six...

BOBBIE

*Where will it deliver us?*

ERIKSON

...Twelve sixty-seven...

BOBBIE

*I slip on the boards*

*Damp with drizzle and slime*

*Up we go hurry quick*

*A ramp starts to climb*

*Then quick up the steps*

*To the top deck where*

*There's finally space*

*And there's finally air...*

OAKLEY

Got it.

BOBBIE

*(to the BAND, pleased and delighted)*

And oh yes, there's music... *(The BAND adds in, playing a waltz)*

Oh yes, that's just right!

*(back to the audience)*

And we all look out,

Across the hats and umbrellas

And Uncle says,

BOBBIE AND OLAF

"Look, all the ladies and fellas

Are dressed to the nines."

BOBBIE AND OLAF

*There'll be*

*Everything*

*We've never seen*

*Fancy dresses, fancy hats*

*Women in their fancy boots*

*All the men in new cravats*

*Tango dancing and tub races*

*Coming home with sunburned faces*

*And all of this only a boat ride away.*

OAKLEY

Twelve sixty-six

OAKLEY

Twelve sixty-seven

ERIKSON

Twelve sixty-eight, Twelve sixty-nine,

Twelve seventy, seventy-one,

Seventy-two, seventy-three

OAKLEY

Twelve seventy-two?

ERIKSON

No, twelve seventy-three

SOLVEIG, MARIANNE, JEANNE,

DEREK, DOUG, MONICA, ERIK

*There'll be everything*

*I've never seen*

*And everything only a boat ride away*

*Everything*

*I've never seen*

*And all of this only a boat ride away*

BOBBIE

I'm going to the railing.

SOLVEIG

I'm coming with you!

BOBBIE

I'm going alone!

SOLVEIG

Why can't I come too?

BOBBIE

Mama! Why must she always  
Tug on my sleeve?

MARIANNE

Oh both of you, stop it  
Not here, not now, please!

BOBBIE

*And so through the crowd  
The coats and the dresses  
We weave our way slowly  
I push and she presses  
To the edge, to the railing  
Through the perfume and sweat  
Through the wool and the lace  
Till finally we get  
A breath of fresh air!*

SOLVEIG

And look, way down there!

BOBBIE

*Still more and more people  
In the drizzle and damp  
Lined up on the dock  
Climbing the ramp*

*Music pauses a moment as SOLVEIG turns to BOBBIE.*

SOLVEIG

How many can fit?

PEDERSEN

*(interrupting)* Twenty-five hundred. Not including crew, of course. Good morning, ladies.



How are you today?

BOBBIE

*(freezes, taken aback)*

Fine. Thank you.

PEDERSEN

Looking forward to the trip?

BOBBIE.

Yes sir. I think so.

PEDERSEN

Glad to hear it. *(to ERICKSON)* Erickson, leaning starboard, trim her up a bit!

ERICKSON

Yes, sir, I know. It's just them loading, sir. *(calls to others)* Boys, bring in water to tanks two and three, port-side.

BOBBIE

*And it starts to rain again*

*Umbrellas bloom*

*Like upside down tulips*

SOLVEIG

*Or maybe mushrooms*

BOBBIE

*And above us all*

*A huge building looms*

*With hundreds of windows*

*And hundreds of rooms*

*And the clock above Says*

*it's Seven Fifteen*

*With enormous hands*

*When the boat starts to lean...*

LEANING SOUND INTENSIFIES

Not a lot, just a little...

SOLVEIG

*(nervous, looks to BOBBIE)*

A little more than would seem

Like you'd want it to lean...

*Suddenly ILSE emerges alone from the water, both gasping for survival and panicked.*

ILSE

William! William!

Oh where is he, where are you...

WILLIAM!!!

I, my baby, I don't know where you...

Oh, I had him, I had his hand,

And then I, I meant to –

Oh where did you go, baby?

I can't...I can't find... *(begins to lose it)*

I can't, I can't keep... *(begins to sink below our view)*

I, I'm too heavy, too heavy with...

Oh God, what have I, what...? *(and she's gone)*

*Lights up on BOBBIE and SOLVEIG.*

MARIANNE

*(from off)*

Bobbie! Where are you?

SOLVEIG

Is it alright?

BOBBIE

It's fine. It's fun!

Everyone's cheering!

MARIANNE

Come back here, now!

BOBBIE

*(annoyed)*

Okay, I will!

*(to herself)*

Does she have to shout?

SOLVEIG

We should go back.

BOBBIE

I know, I will!

SOLVEIG

What's wrong?

BOBBIE

Nothing.

SOLVEIG  
Why are you mad?

BOBBIE  
I'm not mad, okay?!  
*(imitating MARIANNE's accent)*  
"Kom beck here, now!"

*Unbeknownst to BOBBIE, MARIANNE has come within bearing distance.*

MARIANNE  
Bobbie!

BOBBIE  
*(caught)*  
Sorry...

MARIANNE  
Don't wander off.  
Stand closer to me.  
*(to herself)*  
I don't like the feel.  
The feel of this ship

OLAF  
Marianne, don't worry!  
Every boat tips

MARIANNE  
So many people,  
Too many, too crowded

OLAF  
They wouldn't put more  
Than what was allowed.

*LEANING SOUND*

SOLVEIG  
Mama?

ERICKSON  
Dammit, now we're listing to port.

SOLVEIG  
Mama, should we be leaning this way?

OLAF  
 Nothing to worry about. All boats sway!  
 It's what a boat does. No need to be frightened.

MARIANNE  
 I said I don't like it. But your Uncle is right.

ERICKSON  
*(calling to the crew)* Bring some ballast into tanks two and three, starboard!

OLAF  
 And besides, we've been through much worse.  
 You remember? The crossing?  
 Now that was a journey  
 We've told you the story?

BOBBIE  
*(to herself)* A few hundred times...

MARIANNE  
 Olaf, please, it's so boring.

OLAF  
*This water, of course, is nothing, all mud,  
 Not even a river, it's more like a puddle.  
 We crossed the ocean, stuck down below  
 "In steerage" they call it, where cattle are stowed.*

SOLVEIG  
 But why are we tipping?

OLAF  
 No! Then we would tip  
 The boat would pitch forward, the whole goddamn ship!  
 Sorry.  
*But up on the deck, in the wind, we would lean  
 Gazing across The Great In-Between.  
 Old struggles behind, new ones before us.*

ALL IMMIGRANTS  
*...A ragged, pathetic, moth-eaten chorus.  
 Can it be true?  
 An ocean away  
 The world will be different  
 Just as they say?*

OLAF  
*An answer to our hopes and prayers.*

MARIANNE AND BOBBIE

*Or just a place where no one cares?*

ALL IMMIGRANTS

*...And all of this only...*

OLAF

And then...

BOBBIE

Yes...

OLAF

Your father...

BOBBIE

Yes.

OLAF

My brother...

BOBBIE

I know.

OLAF

Something he'd got on the ship, down below  
Nothing to be done, and soon --

BOBBIE

Yes, I know!

OLAF

*(with resolve, turns back to BOBBIE and SOLVEIG)*

But: jobs could be found in Chicago, they said.

MUSICIAN 8

Next stop, Union Station!

*A whistle blows.*

OLAF

"Western Electric." It is something to do with... 'telephone?'

*(looks at MARIANNE)*

We should try, yes?

*They form a tableau of The Immigrant Family. OLAF sees around them only the promise;  
MARIANNE, only the despair.*

ALL IMMIGRANTS

*And indeed there was  
Everything  
We'd never seen*

OLAF

*Or heard, or felt,*

MARIANNE

*Or smelled*

SOLVEIG

*A woman looking like a queen!*

MARIANNE

*The way my nose rebelled,*

OLAF

*The clanging of the streetcar bell!*

MARIANNE

*The ever-present stockyard smell*

OLAF

*The carriages where ladies sit*

MARIANNE

*The streets, the sewage, the rats, the...*

OLAF

*(calming her, pleading)*

Marianne, please. We can make it here. I know we can.

OLAF AND MARIANNE

*And all of this only a lifetime away...*

OLAF

Now that was danger. That was a journey. This? This is...

*(LEANING SOUND)*

SOLVEIG

We're tipping the other way now...

OLAF

Don't worry. She'll come back to trim. They always do. Come, let's go down to the main deck.

SOLVEIG  
Is it alright?

BOBBIE  
*(comforting her)*  
It's okay. It's like it's taking a breath  
Just a very deep breath...

*Lights down on BOBBIE and SOLVEIG as...*  
REGGIE BOWLES surfaces, in a separate pool of water, with ILSE, a woman he's pulled to the  
surface. She comes up gasping, splashing, panicked.

*(MUSIC 3: ILSE PART ONE)*

<< TRACK 3 >>

REGGIE  
Take a breath, you're OK now, just take a deep breath!

ILSE  
Where is he? Have you – have you seen him?

REGGIE  
*(struggling with her)* Ma'am? No, I --

ILSE  
*(desperate)* William! Have you seen William? Was he here, have you... Where is he?

REGGIE  
Ma'am, I don't know, I'm, I'm --

ILSE  
I had him here, I had his hand! My baby! My son!

REGGIE  
*(struggles to grab something for her to hold onto)* Here, look, take this --

ILSE  
Oh God, oh God! What have I done?

*REGGIE finds her a piece of debris and, almost overcome with fatigue, she pulls herself onto it.*

REGGIE  
There. There you go. Just rest a bit.

ILSE  
Where is he? I have to see him, I want to hold him --

REGGIE

Ma'am, I'm sure someone, somebody, you know... There were lots of people, someone else's got him, I'm sure of it –

ILSE

Do you think so?

REGGIE

Sure. Absolutely.

ILSE

Yes, that's right.

Surely someone grabbed his little hand

And brought him up

Don't you think?

How many are here?

REGGIE

I, I don't know...

ILSE

Hundreds, maybe?

REGGIE

You're number eight. For me.

ILSE

*(not really hearing him)*

Or more? And surely one of them...

*(relapsing)*

Oh what have I done, what have I done!

REGGIE

I'll look for your boy.

ILSE

Will you? Will you?

REGGIE

I'm the human frog!

ILSE

He's wearing knickerbocker pants,

A gold medallion around his neck,

He was here, right here by my side, and I

I was...I was...

And that's when it started



REGGIE  
What's that?

ILSE  
The leaning, the tipping.  
That's when it began  
The sliding, the slipping

REGGIE  
Look, ma'am, we can't stay here –

ILSE  
And I went to the railing  
To give a small wave...

REGGIE  
Ma'am?

ILSE  
...I let go of his hand.

*ILSE's SISTER steps forward.*

SISTER  
Ilse! Pay attention!

ILSE  
*(to SISTER)*  
I...yes, I...  
You've got to find William!  
You've got to save him!

REGGIE  
Yes yes, I will, but right now just gimme your hand, we gotta get outta here, okay?

ILSE  
He has, he has  
A gold medallion, here, around his neck –

REGGIE  
Right, gold medallion, knickerbocker pants, I got it, now look --

ILSE  
Promise me, please  
Promise you'll save him!

REGGIE  
I will, I –

SISTER

Ilse! Are you listening?

ILSE

Yes, I'm here, I'm here...

REGGIE

Ma'am...?

SISTER

Ilse!

REGGIE

Look, I'm gonna come right back, okay?

ILSE

*Wake up! This isn't some story  
From one of your books, stop dreaming away!*

REGGIE

I'll look for your boy. Gold medallion, knickerbocker pants.

*He dives back down and disappears.*

SISTER

*I got you this job, so don't dare ignore me.  
Before you know it, you'll have wasted the day.  
Now right over there is the company store  
The hospital's down to the right  
The gym is down there, past the factory floor  
In that building are classes at night.  
The library –*

ILSE

*(lost in the idea)*  
Our own library?...

SISTER

*(snapping her out of it)*  
*Wake up! Pay attention! You won't be able  
To do all the things that you're used to, you know  
Here, take this wire and wind it to cable  
Don't go too fast and don't go too slow.  
You've left picture books behind you for good.  
It's time to grow up like a young woman should.*

*She sits ILSE down on a bench, next to other WOMEN, where they all sit and wind cable all together.*

ILSE

*So there we sat and my sister was right  
From girl to a woman almost overnight  
Just one of the hundreds of women at tables  
Spinning wire into coil, then coil into cable*

WOMEN (including SISTER)

*Wake up! Pay attention! That task that you do  
Is part of a bigger machine, look sharp!  
So many people depend upon you.  
These wires will vibrate like strings of a harp  
With passionate words, profound conversation  
'Cross cities and counties and states, the whole nation.*

ILSE

*Then I looked 'round again at the women in rows  
Could they be as restless as me, I suppose,  
How would I know if they felt the same way?  
And given the chance they might rise up and say:*

ILSE AND WOMEN

*I'm bored! I'm bored! So incredibly bored!  
I was made for more than this! Rescue me, Lord!  
I so want to dance!  
Or go kick a ball!  
Or laugh like a lunatic and race down the hall!*

ILSE

*But instead we all sat*

ILSE AND WOMEN

*As if we were content  
Winding our cable  
And that's how we spent  
Our twenties  
And thirties  
And our forties, too  
Until life was over*

ILSE

*That's just what we'd do.  
At the end of the day we walked through the gates  
My knuckles felt knotted, my fingers were rough  
(to SISTER) "I don't think I can do this each day"*

SISTER

*You'll learn soon enough.*

*Under the following, a brief “Men as Circling Sharks” ballet. They eye ILSE from behind, and as soon as she turns and meets their gaze, they turn away,  
Her SISTER comes along and snaps her fingers in front of ILSE’s face.*

SISTER

*Wake up! Pay attention, and keep yourself open  
For the right opportunity should it come along.  
There’s plenty of men here, not-so-secretly hopin’  
To find a young woman who wants to belong  
A young woman like you to belong on their arm  
Just smile, for God’s sake! It won’t do any harm.*

ILSE

*But there was another, I’d seen him before  
At lunch and in line at the company store.*

HUSBAND

*I work installation, laying deep underground  
From spindles the very same cable you’ve wound  
So you see,*

ILSE

He said

HUSBAND

*We’re already connected.  
Now stop and listen. I know that I’m only  
A cable-runner, and that’s all that I do.  
But I know that I don’t want to be lonely  
And unless I guess wrong, neither do you.*

ILSE

*And his hands were callused,  
But his voice was gentle,  
And I don’t know  
Was it at all instrumental?  
But the world glowed orange  
As the setting sun burned  
And a quiet took hold  
And it seemed that I turned  
Into one of those ladies  
In those pictures books  
That father brought home  
The ones that I’d look through  
In the dead of night  
When I was sure I’d find my own  
Extraordinary light.*

## ILSE AND MUSICIAN 8

*Things shift, they change  
That's life, it rearranges,  
Things tip, they lean Till  
you find your between  
Something old, something new  
Change is good for you And  
in time he will be, too.*

*Lights down on ILSE and...*

*Lights up on REGGIE, swimming under water. He is calm but focused, urgent.*

**(MUSIC 4: REGGIE 1)**

**<< TRACK 4 >>**

REGGIE

Into the river  
Dive deep deeper down  
To the green greener green  
Then into the black  
Eighteen seconds...nineteen...  
That woman was strange  
Own damn mother  
Never held me so close  
*Find her boy*  
*Find her son The*  
*Human Frog*  
*Will get it done*  
Twenty-four...twenty-five...  
Ozzie comes in, in he comes  
A boat he says,  
What boat, I says,  
I dunno, a boat  
So I shoot down  
Fast as flying  
Skid to a stop  
Boat lyin' there  
Like a dinosaur, dead  
*And all these people Just*  
*standin' 'round Well*  
*the Human Frog*  
*Ain't gonna just sit*  
*Watch people drown*  
But a cop comes up  
"Where you goin'?"  
To help, I say  
Nah uh, he says,  
So I pops him

Just a quick one  
 That ol' wrench  
 Crunches his ear  
 Pretty good enough  
 And in I'm jumping  
 Human Tadpole  
 Human Frog.  
 Dives deeper still  
 Ears all cracklin'  
 Thirty-seven...thirty-eight...  
 Three goddamn minutes.  
 Three goddamn minutes he was under.

*HARRY HOUDINI appears above, watching him, stopwatch in hand.*

HOUDINI  
*'Atta boy, Reggie Bowles  
 Keep up the good work  
 Just think how your legend will shine*

REGGIE  
 Damn right, it will!

HOUDINI  
*More famous than me  
 The Great Houdini  
 If you break this record of mine*

REGGIE  
 Shit, I can do that.  
 C'mon, Reggie  
 Eyes open, mouth shut  
*A woman's skirt  
 Billows and blooms  
 Face all pale, hair like mother's  
 I wish she'd close her eyes  
 But away she comes  
 All nice and easy  
 C'mon, lady, dance with me, dance with me  
 Now up towards the up  
 And all I see  
 Are rags and shadows  
 Human Tadpole  
 Damn, she's heavy  
 Human Frog  
 Human tadpole  
 At the ready  
 Human Frog*

HOUDINI  
*Forty nine, fifty  
 Fifty-two, fifty-three*

*C'mon, daylight*  
*C'mon, lady*  
*Now through the last bit*  
*Of sewage and shit*  
*Human tadpole*  
*World's greatest*  
*Human Frog*  
*Human Tadpole*  
*World's Most Famous*  
*Human Frog*

HOUDINI  
*Fifty-seven, fifty-eight*  
*Fifty-nine, sixty*

HOUDINI  
*World's greatest*  
*Human Frog*  
*Human Tadpole*  
*World's Most Famous*  
*Human Frog*

*REGGIE breaks the surface, gasping. He calls to a Fireman.*

REGGIE  
 Hey! Hey you! I got one!

FIREMAN  
 Alive?

REGGIE  
 Nope. Here – take her!

FIREMAN  
 Body number twenty-eight. It's a woman.

OTTO  
 Woman number twenty-eight.

*A Policeman takes the body. Reggie turns to the man with the stopwatch and bowler hat.*

REGGIE  
 How'd I do?

HOUDINI  
 Sixty-three seconds!  
*Not bad, Reggie Bowles,*  
*If you don't mind amateur fare*

REGGIE  
 Amateur -- !?!!

HOUDINI  
*Well, I was down*  
*Three times as long*  
*Try and match me if you dare*

REGGIE  
 Nothing I like better than a bet, you bastard.

*He dives back down into the water.  
Lights up on ILSE.*

**(MUSIC 5: ILSE PART TWO)**

**<< TRACK 5 >>**

**ILSE**

*(thinks, begins a catalogue)  
And his shit stank up the bathroom each morning  
And he'd bring home friends at night with no warning  
And his breath was awful sometimes, undeniably  
But he came home to me each night quite reliably And  
his hands, though always blistered and rough,  
Were tender with me and gentle enough  
And his eyes would crinkle when he gave into laughter  
And when we'd make love and he'd fall asleep after  
Night after night, listening to his snoring  
God help me, but it all became just so... (sigh)  
Yes, I loved him, perhaps not with passion  
Not like in those books  
But definitely love, enduring, I told myself  
Diligent, caring...*

**MUSICIAN 4**

*But pretty soon you'll find that you're lit  
By the same light that was there just before  
No duller, no less true  
But now merely familiar to you  
In every way just as bright*

**ILSE AND MUSICIAN 4**

*But now just ordinary light...*

**SISTER AND WOMEN**

*Wake up! Pay attention! You know that it's time  
For you to start thinking much bigger  
A woman like you so ripe, in her prime  
Should be ready to embrace life with vigor!*

**MIDWIFE**

*So lean along with it, relax, don't fight it  
Everything's going to be alright.*

**MIDWIFE, SISTER AND WOMAN (TIFFANY)**

*Soon you'll have your own daughter or son*

**HUSBAND**

*And soon be a family.*



*The MIDWIFE hands her the new baby.*

ILSE

*(gasps)*

*...And soon it was done.*

And there was William.

He took my breath, I couldn't stop gazing

*Those fingers, those lips, and now yes, those feet!*

*Those other babies were never as sweet*

*His perfect yawn, his sweet little hat,*

*And where'd he learn to sneeze like that?*

*The WOMEN go about the routine of their chores. ILSE is at first completely involved in her baby, but eventually gets caught up in the routine of the chores.*

WOMEN

*Get up to make breakfast*

*And warming the tub*

*And tending the fire*

*And washing and scrubbing*

*And making the lunch*

*And off to the store*

*To get the supplies*

*And home once more*

*Make dinner for husband*

*And then for the son*

*And before I knew it*

*The day would be done.*

ILSE

*Get up to make breakfast*

*Warming the tub*

*Make dinner for husband*

*And then for the son*

*And before I knew it*

*The day would be done.*

ILSE

*I looked around at the other young mothers*

*Perhaps this despair was shared by the others.*

*Going on walks and chatting away*

*And given the chance, they might rise up and say:*

WOMEN

*I'm bored! I'm bored! So incredibly bored!*

*I was made for more than this! Rescue me, Lord!*

*Let's jump in the lake*

*Or run in the rain*

*To wash all this off and be just me again!*

ILSE

*But instead we all sat*

## ILSE AND WOMEN

*As if we were content  
 In our rocking chairs  
 And that's how we spent  
 Our twenties  
 And thirties  
 And our forties, too  
 Until life was over*

## ILSE

*That's just what we'd do.  
 Then one autumn evening  
 At the window,  
 I saw someone  
 Had streaked the sky  
 With wisps of pink  
 In blue-ing green The  
 very colors  
 I had seen  
 In the books  
 Beneath my bed  
 As a little girl  
 That I once read  
 By candlelight, In  
 the dead of night  
 When I was sure I'd find my own  
 Extraordinary light*

## ILSE AND MUSICIAN 6

*Things shift, they change  
 That's life, it rearranges,  
 Things tip, they lean  
 But you don't think it means  
 It'll never go back  
 You'll be back on track  
 Just as soon as everything starts to lean back.*

## MUSICIAN 4

*The very next day, it's mother and son  
 Out for a date downtown  
 Off to The Fair, to the general store,  
 They take the streetcar down*

## TRAIN CONDUCTOR

State Street, Marshall Field's.

## MUSICIAN 4

*The trees were especially lovely that fall*

ILSE

And William had never seen buildings that tall.

TRAIN CONDUCTOR

The Fair Store.

ILSE

*So I promised him that we'd find something sweet  
So we went to the grocer next door for a treat...*

*"William" bumps into a GROCER, apron tied around his waist.*

ILSE

William, watch where you're! -- *(William bumps into Grocer)* Oh, excuse me, I'm so sorry!

GROCER

Quite alright, no trouble at all. *(He immediately crouches down next to William).* Well hello, old man, how are you today? *(Then he stands, smiles disarmingly).* Good afternoon, can I help you find anything?

ILSE

*And a butterfly was near  
I could feel, I could hear  
Its wings close at hand And  
I thought it might land  
And I thought it might linger  
If, just, for a moment, I held out my finger...*

*Lights down on Ilse. Lights up on BOBBIE.*

BOBBIE

Like it's taking a breath  
A very deep breath. Uck!  
This water stinks  
Of sewage, and oil  
And something's burning, something awful  
Like burned potatoes  
Yes, yes, when I burned the potatoes,  
Black in their jackets  
And Uncle Olaf came home,  
"The smell, what's that smell,  
I can smell it down the street!"  
He chased me through the house with a broom  
"You fool! Do you know how much these cost?"  
I ran and hid under the bed  
I could see his feet, even his shoes looked angry  
But then...

OLAF AND BOBBIE

They're just potatoes.

BOBBIE

...he finally said.

OLAF

It's alright. They're just potatoes.

BOBBIE

Yes, that's what I'm smelling, it's just potatoes.

*REGGIE BOWLES suddenly erupts from the water.  
Gasping, coughing, he looks around, sees BOBBIE.*

REGGIE

Oh. Hey. Who are you?

BOBBIE

I'm, um --- what?

REGGIE

Where's, uh...where's the other one...the woman...

BOBBIE

I...what? What other...?

REGGIE

Huh. No, she's...you're...Okay, okay. *(looking around as he treads water)* Huh. How'd I...? Huh.

BOBBIE

Who...who are you?

REGGIE

Who are you?

BOBBIE

My name's ...um, Bobbie.

REGGIE

Okay. Name's Reggie, Reggie Bowles. The Human Frog. *(looks around, perplexed)* Huh. Boat's so goddam big.

BOBBIE

How...?

REGGIE

Just swam under. Under the boat. Everybody else just standing around. (beat) How long you been down here?

BOBBIE

I don't know...a long, a long time I think...

REGGIE

It's lunchtime up top.

BOBBIE

...Lunch?...

REGGIE

Yes, ma'am. Both hands straight up, noon o'clock.

BOBBIE

Then, I've been here...

REGGIE

He offered me a sandwich. No sir, I say. Frogs don't eat when they're swimming. Some frogs can go three weeks without eating.

BOBBIE

...almost five hours?

REGGIE

Man, stinks down here!

Smell that? Like...like, cooking? Meat, maybe?

BOBBIE

Yes, or potatoes --?

REGGIE

It's flesh. Couple of 'em, brought 'em up. One guy's face, burned up pretty bad. Kid, really. Little older than me, not much. Well, come on. I'll lead you out. (*he prepares to dive back down*)

BOBBIE

(*panicked*) No, wait! You said under, you, you came *under* the...?

REGGIE

Yeah, gotta go pretty deep, so don't lose sight of me –

BOBBIE

No, I --

REGGIE

(*realizing*) Oh. Oh! Can't swim, huh?

BOBBIE

No, I can swim, just not --

REGGIE

A floater, huh? Not a real swimmer, just a floater?

BOBBIE

No, I don't know, just not...*under*...

REGGIE

Okay. That's okay. I'm the Human Frog, I can, I'll swim down, I'll tell 'em, okay? I'll tell 'em you're here. (*looks around*) If I can figure out, you know...where...here...is. Okay. Okay. Three minutes he was under. Three whole minutes! Gotta beat that. I can beat that easy.

BOBBIE

Who?

REGGIE

Houdini. Harry Houdini! I'll be back. Kay?

*And without waiting for an answer, he dives back into the water. Confused, BOBBIE calls after him.*

BOBBIE

No! No!!!!

Don't leave me here by myself!

I don't want to be here by myself.

Help! (*but her voice only echoes off the empty pocket of water and ship. She tries to calm herself.*)

He'll be back. He said he'll tell them.

Just wait and they'll come.

They'll come...

*Lights down on BOBBIE.  
Lights up on MUSICIANS.*

MUSICIAN 4

An interlude, concerning  
A Brief History of the Chicago River  
In four verses  
And repeating, but varied, chorus

***(MUSIC 6: INTO THE RIVER)***

**<< TRACK 6 >>**

MUSICIAN 7

*It's hard to believe  
Before clay and concrete  
Locks and canals*

*And alleys and streets  
 For centuries  
 The reeds and trees lined  
 A place where deer drank  
 And raccoons dined  
 Fed by three streams  
 The current was steady  
 The Indians watched The  
 whirlpools and eddies  
 To see where the perch  
 Played and slept  
 Learning the secrets  
 That this river kept*

ALL

*And into the river  
 The herons would dip  
 The fish would sleep  
 Potawatomi slip As  
 quickly past  
 In their slim canoes  
 As the seasons repainted  
 Their colors and hues  
 And the snow and the rains  
 Washed away the great plains  
 And swept it all...*

MUSICIAN 2

*Into the river*

MUSICIAN 4

*Then comes DuSable,  
 Jean-Baptiste  
 Neither a vagabond,  
 Soldier or priest  
 Just an explorer,  
 A fur-trader, too  
 Built the first house on  
 Michigan Avenue  
 The Indians knew him  
 As the Black Chief  
 The last man they knew  
 Who wasn't a thief He  
 made it safe  
 For the white man to follow  
 Their mouths opened wide  
 And the river they swallowed*

## MUSICIAN 7

*And into the river The  
 barges would come  
 The mighty north woods (+ MUSICIAN)  
 Now turned to lumber  
 Three-sailed ships (+MUSICIANS)  
 From across the great lakes  
 Soon fill the river  
 With whatever man makes (+MUSICIANS)  
 Those people keep comin'  
 So keep those mills hummin'  
 And sweep it all*

## MUSICIAN 2

*Into the river*

*Now open for business  
 The river is clogged  
 With trappers and furs  
 Lumber-shovers and logs  
 Dairy-fresh milk  
 And prairie-fresh wheat  
 And add to the list*

## ALL

*To top it all: Meat!*

## MUSICIAN 2

*And everything's used  
 From tail to snout  
 The country's hungry  
 Can't do without  
 And whatever's left  
 Messrs Armour and Swift Say:*

## MUSICIAN 4

*"Throw in the river  
 And just let it drift"*

## ALL

*And into the river The  
 entrails and blood  
 Mix the oil and the fat  
 With the silt and the mud  
 The solvents and lye  
 The shit from the cows  
 And chickens and pigs  
 It's all shit anyhow*



*Yes it bursts into flame  
But still flows just the same  
So sweep it all*

MUSICIAN 2

*Into the river*

MUSICIAN 4

*But along with this influx  
Of people and dollars  
The river's soon swimming  
With typhoid and cholera  
The slow recognition  
"Don't shit where you drink"  
Begins to sink in-- "Oh, that's what stinks."*

ALL

*So turn back the river  
Turn it around  
Send it all backwards  
Up's the new down  
Get the best engineers  
To reverse the flow  
And away from the lake  
The water will go With  
a quick fix today  
All our problems go away  
So turn around*

MUSICIAN 2

*Turn around the river*

MUSICIAN 7

*But into the river  
However it flows  
West to East or vice-versa  
Still everything goes  
The guts and the gristle  
The chemicals and dung  
The blood of the old The  
blood of the young  
The sweat of the worker  
The sweat of the whore  
The piss and the semen  
And a thousand things more  
And the forgiving rain  
Sweeps it all up again  
Sweeps it all...*

*Lights up abruptly on REGGIE, under water.*

**(MUSIC 7: REGGIE 2)**

**<< TRACK 7 >>**

REGGIE

*Into the river*

*Like a rat on fire*

*I dive right in All  
them others*

*Standing 'round*

*Just starin' down*

*To hell with them*

*I'm divin' in The*

*Human Frog*

*Won't sit and watch*

*That clock's big hands*

*Sweep all that life*

*Into the sewer*

*Dammit, where's that boy*

*Where's her son*

*Said I'd find him*

*Gold medallion*

*Round his neck*

HOUDINI

*Sixty-eight, sixty-nine*

HOUDINI

*Eighty-four, eighty-five*

*HOUDINI appears above with the bowler hat and stopwatch.*

HOUDINI

*Eighty-four, eighty-five*

REGGIE

*Now down deeper down*

*To the green greener green*

REGGIE AND HOUDINI

*Ninety...*

HOUDINI

*That's it son!*

REGGIE and HOUDINI

*Ninety-one...*

HOUDINI

*That's how it's done.*

REGGIE

*Ha! How 'd you do it?*

Three goddam minutes!

HOUDINI  
Years of practice  
Known World-Round as

HOUDINI  
Harry Houdini

REGGIE  
Reggie Bowles!

HOUDINI  
The Elusive American

REGGIE  
The Human Frog!

HOUDINI AND REGGIE  
In The Greatest Performance of His Strenuous Career

REGGIE  
It's cold colder cold

HOUDINI  
I've been in worse  
The Charles River, completely frozen.

REGGIE  
Can't see crap  
Like a bad dream

HOUDINI  
How the hell'd you do it, Reggie?

REGGIE  
Practiced in a bathtub, same as you  
I read the papers

HOUDINI  
Soon you'll be *in* the papers.

REGGIE  
More bodies here  
Eyes wide-starin'

HOUDINI  
C'mon, Reggie!

REGGIE  
The hem of a skirt

Hips, a shoulder  
I think I can grab her.

HOUDINI

*Come on, man!*

*I know you're not one*

*To give up when the going gets tough*

REGGIE

Chest starting to tighten

HOUDINI

*Prove to me*

*Prove to them all*

*You're made of much sterner stuff*

REGGIE

I've got her!

HOUDINI AND REGGIE

Mother will be so proud!

HOUDINI

Uh oh, Reggie, better get back up there.

REGGIE

So many legs

Doing the craziest dance

HOUDINI

You've almost used up all your chances

REGGIE

*Human Tadpole*

*Sunlight and air*

*Human Frog*

*Human Tadpole*

*Almost there*

*Human Frog*

REGGIE

One-thirty!

*He breaks the surface,. Gasping for breath, he hands the body to a FIREMAN.*

REGGIE

Hey! Excuse me, sir! I've got another one!

FIREMAN

Number sixty-eight.

OTTO

Number sixty-eight.

HOUDINI

How you feel?

REGGIE

Never better.

HOUDINI

That was barely over two minute, Reggie!

REGGIE

I can do longer!

HOUDINI

A full minute longer?

REGGIE

Hell yes!

HOUDINI

Well then, son, you gonna use those lungs for swimmin' or gabbin'? Get back down there!

REGGIE

Yes sir! (*remembering*) That boy! I've got to find the boy.

REGGIE AND HOUDINI

Gotta get past three minutes, Reggie!

*REGGIE dives back down. Lights up on ILSE.*

GROCER

Good afternoon. Can I help you find anything?

ILSE

No, I, thank you, we're just...no, thank you.

GROCER

No bread or anything?

ILSE

No.

GROCER

A fresh cut of meat?

ILSE

No, no thank you.

GROCER

Some potatoes just came in...

ILSE

No, really, thank you.

GROCER

*(brings her an object from behind the counter).*

Or look at this – do you know what this is?

ILSE

*(wary but intrigued)*

No...

GROCER

Here, go ahead and touch it. *(she does)* Bumpy, right? Like a bumpy pear. But here, look at this. *(He takes a knife, cuts it open)* There. Feel that. *(she does)* Smooth as silk. Now taste it. *(she hesitates)* Go ahead, put a little on your finger, taste it. It won't kill you, I promise. *(she does)* Different, right?

ILSE

Yes. Quite.

GROCER

Different from anything you've ever tasted before, isn't it. In your whole entire life. You know where this comes from? South America. Send 'em by boat through that Panama Canal, up to California, then across by train, comes into Union Station every Tuesday. It's called an A-vo-ca-do.

ILSE

A-vo-ca-do.

GROCER

That's right, you got it. Spanish, I guess. Most other stores don't sell 'em, but I think they're going to catch on. Here, take one home.

ILSE

No, no thank you.

GROCER

Come on, bring it home to your husband, see what he thinks. Tell him it's from South America.

ILSE

Alright. *(to her little boy)* William, come with me please. *(to GROCER)* Thank you.

GROCER

You're welcome. Come back, tell me what he thinks.

*(MUSIC 8: ILSE PART THREE)*

<< TRACK 8 >>

ILSE

*That night at home I meant to share  
The day's events, the bumpy pear,  
But a part of me wanted to hold on  
To this strange new thing, this strange new fruit,*

SISTER

*While the husband dreamt in bed  
She stole away instead  
To where she had hid it on a shelf*

ILSE

*And there and then  
In the cool moonlight  
I ate the thing myself.*

*ILSE and WILLIAM return to the store.*

GROCER

Well hello again! Back so soon? *(to WILLIAM)* What's the news, old man? You think the A's stand a chance, or is Boston gonna take 'em down, four-zip? Not sure, huh? Well, lemme know when you are, so I can place my bet, OK? *(turns to ILSE, awkward silence between the two.)* So how'd your husband like it?

ILSE

Sorry? Oh. Yes. Um, he didn't taste it.

GROCER

Oh? No?

ILSE

He works nights this week.

GROCER

Oh. I see.

ILSE

Cable runner.

GROCER

Oh, you're out at Hawthorne, eh?

ILSE

Yes.

GROCER

Must be a strong man. That's hard work.

ILSE

Yes. He is. It is.

*(pause)*

Well. Goodbye.

GROCER

...Ummm...didn't you want something?

ILSE

I'm sorry?

GROCER

You came all this way. Was there something you wanted? To buy?

ILSE

Oh. Yes. Ummm...just some flour, please.

GROCER

Flour.

ILSE

Yes. Please.

GROCER

Flour. *(sbrugs)* Okey doke. Got plenty of that.

ILSE

Thank you.

GROCER *(measuring out the flour for her)*

Two or three pounds okay?

ILSE

Two pounds, please.

GROCER

Sure thing. *(hands her the bag)*

Running short of flour out there in Cicero, are they?



ILSE

*(totally flustered)*

Oh. No, we were...I, yes, well. William, let's go. Now, please! (to GROCER) Thank you. Goodbye!

GROCER

So long! *(calls out as they go)* Thank you for coming again!

ILSE

This is foolish! Absurd! And I swore  
I'd not go back again.

*(beat)*

But I did.

MESSENGER, ILSE AND GROCER

*Things change, they shift*

*But everything drifts*

*Things tip, they lean*

*But there's a new part of me*

*I've not seen before*

*Or an old part of me*

*That I don't see any more.*

*She's startled by a MESSENGER on the other side of the stage.*

MESSENGER

Ma'am? Your delivery is here.

ILSE

What? There must be a mistake. What delivery?

MESSENGER

Balaban & Sons, ma'am. This box of groceries.

ILSE

But I didn't –

MESSENGER

And this.

*She opens the envelope, reads the note.*

GROCER

May I see you alone?

ILSE

That's all that it said  
Just those five words

But they burned in my head...  
 Just those five words  
 No more, no less,  
 Perhaps full of meaning, perhaps meaningless

*The HUSBAND comes up to her, sighs.*

HUSBAND

Ach. Night shift. Third in a row. *(kisses her on the cheek, goes off shaking his head)*

ILSE

*(calling after him)*

Be safe.

*She watches his departure a moment, pauses, then decides; she boards a streetcar.*

MUSICIAN 4

*The evening is crisp*

*She floats through the crowd*

*Just like a will o' the wisp*

STREETCAR DRIVER (SCOTT)

Division Street!

MUSICIAN 4

*Climbs the stairs*

*Reaches his door...*

*The GROCER opens the door. They face each other a moment, then embrace tightly.*

GROCER

I want you to stay.

ILSE

*Five little words*

*No more.*

*Lights down on ILSE.*

*Lights up on BOBBIE*

BOBBIE

*Oh it was sad*

*Oh it was sad*

*It was sad when that great ship went down...*

Is that it?

I think that's how it went.

They say on the Titanic

As they waited for the boats to come

They looked up at the stars

Their limbs getting numb  
 That one little boy  
 Looked up at the star until he was rescued  
 I shall place a star there, on the ceiling See  
 how it's glimmering  
 Like the fireflies we caught last summer  
 Solveig and I  
 The waiting, waiting for that green glimmer of hope  
 In the dark of our cupped palms  
 So strangely bright, from so strange a source  
 The tail of a bug, just imagine, a bug!  
 And such extraordinary light...

*Lights back on ILSE*

ILSE  
*And staring there  
 Through the window,  
 I saw the moon Sneak  
 through the sky And  
 drowned us both In  
 blazing white  
 The very same color  
 The very same light  
 That poured through the air  
 Of my little room  
 Onto my bed  
 Fresh from the moon  
 December nights  
 And here it was,*

ILSE AND BOBBIE  
*The most extraordinary light.*

*ILSE comes down to explain to the MUSICIANS and us.*

ILSE  
 So yes, yes, it's true, we embraced  
 But other than that, we were completely chaste  
 Well no; not completely; there was this:  
 Just one very long, very lovely...

*They KISS.*

ILSE  
*(looking at her shoes)*  
 I shouldn't be here.

GROCER

Listen to me:

*The rest of forever*

*We spend alone.*

*Before life, and after,*

*Our bodies and bones*

*Go spinning adrift*

*In endless space*

*We just have this one*

*Quick chance to embrace*

*This one brief blink*

*To be held and to hold*

*Before we're all*

*Back out in the cold*

ILSE

*(turns to him)* I have to go.

GROCER

I know.

ILSE

Then came the letters.

And it was absurd

Each one of them...

GROCER

When will you come again?

ILSE

Had only five words.

GROCER

Your eyes light the day.

ILSE

*Could there be*

*Anything I've never seen*

GROCER

Your smile turns the earth.

ILSE

*A thousand times before*

GROCER

You are everything to me.

ILSE

*Things always look so perfect*

GROCER

Will you not see me?

ILSE

*Through the window of the store*

GROCER

I miss you, please come.

ILSE

*But a man's a man*

*There's nothing new*

GROCER

Why won't you answer me?

ILSE

*(in frustration)*

*What is it he wants me to do?*

GROCER

I'll see you on Saturday.

ILSE

Saturday?!?...

*And all this only an answer away...*

MUSICIAN THREE

*They arrived early And*

*the air grew thicker*

*As they walked up the ramp*

*And the man clicked his clicker*

OAKLEY

...Number twenty-one-oh-nine...ten...eleven...

ILSE

*It was William's first time*

*Aboard a real boat*

*He wanted to climb*

*To the top of the mast*

And it was so crowded

Surely this was more people

Than what was allowed

*(Sound of LEANING)*

## MUSICIAN THREE

*The boat leaned to starboard  
Then back upright  
Then there, on the dock,*

## ILSE AND MUSICIAN THREE

*There in plain sight*

## ILSE

Directly across  
From where I was standing  
I saw *him* there,  
There, on the landing...

*I couldn't believe it*

*He looked sad but brave*

*And I went to the railing*

*To give a small wave*

*(more sounds of LEANING)*

*And this time to port*

*The boat leaned again*

*And I kept waiting For*

*it to right itself when*

*Instead it kept tipping*

*And slowly and strangely,*

*I found myself slipping*

*(Louder LEANING sounds STOP abruptly)*

And I looked back for William

To where he was standing

He looked back, confused:

I'd let go of his hand...

*(boat LEANS again)*

Oh, god. What have I done?

William!

*Then The Big Final Lean happens...Big, BIG sound as...*

## THE BOAT TIPS OVER.

THEN:

***(MUSIC 9: UNDERTAKER'S LAMENT)***

***<< Track 9 >>***

*OTTO MUCHNA, Undertaker, riding his horse towards downtown.*

OTTO (*Verse 1*)

*"A boat's gone over," is all he said*

*But I couldn't bear if it was one or two dead Too  
much noise on the line, and he spoke too fast*

*But it isn't the first time, and it won't be the last*

*Some drunk or a fool has gone into the drink*

*Only to learn that he can't swim and sinks*

*Right down to the bottom, or floats to the top,  
Either way it's my job to fix him up.*

*(Chorus 1)*

*A proper farewell  
Is what they all deserve.  
One last "adieu" to those who die  
Whether coffin or urn  
We all get our turn  
We all get one last chance to shine  
Before the worms start to dine*

*(Bridge)*

*Mary does the make-up  
I start the embalming  
And the whole procedure  
Is strangely, strangely calming  
They must look dignified  
But not too stuffy  
The lips must be full  
But not too puffy  
Stitch the eyes shut  
Don't let them get swollen  
While I get ready  
To empty the colon Then  
she goes to the family  
While I pump the veins  
Till all that remains  
Is a replica  
Of he who's passed on  
For the one you loved  
Is already gone*

*(Verse 2)*

*Then afterwards we all go out back  
I light a cigar and start to relax  
The day drifts up and away with the smoke  
Chat with the boys, we tell a few jokes  
Call it a day. Just another long day.  
Know what we've done Was  
done just the right way.  
That's how things should work, that's what I believe  
It's often all that we can offer the bereaved*

*ALL*

*A proper farewell.  
Is what they all deserve,  
One last "adieu" to those who die*

*For your lying in state  
We give a reasonable rate*

OTTO

*We all get one last chance to shine  
Before the worms start to dine*

*Now what's all this, why is traffic slowing?  
Don't they know there's somewhere I've got to be going?  
Labor troubles again? No, not another riot!  
No, no red flags, and it's far too quiet.*

*He dismounts from his horse. He runs into a man who walks past, in a daze, spins him around.*

*What the devil is taking so long?  
Why have we stopped? What's gone wrong?  
Excuse me, please, can someone here --  
Somebody, anybody? -- make it clear Why  
we've stalled? Can someone explain? It's  
not a disaster, my God, it's just rain!*

*As he turns around, he sees the hull of the boat absolutely covered with bodies. This is represented by suits of clothing on hangers -- men's suits, women's blouses and skirts, children's suits -- being hauled into the air, absolutely soaking wet.*

*As each of The Dead step forward, OTTO or THE FIREMAN pin a piece of paper to a replica of their clothing before it is hauled up to hang suspended in air.*

*As MUSICIAN 2 becomes ANNA KOLAR, a FIREMAN instructs others to lay down a hanger with her clothes.*

**(MUSIC 10: PARADE OF SOULS)**

**<< TRACK 10 >>**

OTTO

Good Christ in heaven!

FIREMAN

Lay her down here, boys. (*pins a number to her clothes*) Girl 87.

ANNA KOLAR--GIRL 87

*Girl Eighty-seven, Anna Kolar*

*Twenty-five years old*

*Stenographer at Western Electric*

*But now I'm dead and cold*

*A pitcher on the ladies softball team The*

*Bloomer Girls, as we were known*

*My favorite dessert: strawberries and cream*



*But today I die alone, die alone  
But today I die alone, die alone*

OTTO: This isn't possible/This can't be

FIREMAN

Bring the next one, set him down  
Number ninety-three.

OTTO

Ninety-?!?

*So early yet, it can't be but nine  
And so many bodies arrayed in a line*

*MAN 55, HENRY CZESKA, watches his suit lifted into the air.*

MAN 93/HENRY CZESKA

*Henry Czeska, age thirty-two  
Freshly, unhappily married  
I wasn't perfect, to be honest with you,  
But this just doesn't seem fair. We  
Argued yesterday again,  
And I silently wished she would die  
But today I woke up and felt different and then  
I meant to say goodbye,  
But I forgot to say goodbye, say goodbye  
I forgot to say goodbye*

KOLAR

*Today I die alone*

CZESKA

*I forgot to say goodbye.*

ANNA KOLAR, HENRY CZESKA, KATHARINE DUBECK

*I just want to know  
Was there a sign,  
Something that I missed?  
A broken mirror  
A missing watch  
Or something far more obvious  
The parted clouds  
The big black crow  
Is it so strange  
I want to know  
If in fact I'm going to die  
On this ordinary morning  
The how and the why?*

## FIREMAN

Woman One-oh-Four

## KATHERINE DUBECK/WOMAN 104

*One-oh-four, Katherine Dubeck,  
Wife of Vincent, age thirty-eight  
Didn't work, I stayed at home  
Mother of Joseph and Kate  
Vince asked me to go to the picnic  
We left the kids with my mother  
I don't know what they'll do now  
They'll have to look after each other  
They'll have to look after each other*

## KOLAR

*Today I die alone*

## JOHN SCHMIDT/MAN #279

*John Schmidt, twenty-three  
Train conductor, south side  
Married to a girl I love  
Though I played a bit on the side  
Is there anything sweet as a woman's smile  
The eyes full of laughter and life  
It seems like all of them perfect, irresistible  
Though I died in the arms of my wife  
I died in the arms of my wife*

*(BETLACK overlap starts)*

*(DUBECK/FISHER/DANNY overlaps begin)*

## JOSEPH BETLACK

*Joseph Betlack, age eighteen I  
wasn't supposed to be here I  
don't even work at the plant  
To me this doesn't seem fair  
There must be a mistake  
I was filling in for one of the staff  
I should have stayed in bed  
What happens now?*

## HELEN FISHER

*Helen Fischer, Purchasing, married twenty years  
My friends told me I was too young that  
It would end in tears, but that's not how things have gone,  
That's not how things have gone*

## DANNY'S FRIEND

*Danny invited me as his guest I thought, "What the hell"  
It seemed like such a simple request and now they're tolling my bell,  
Now they're tolling my bell, my bell, now they're tolling my bell*

DUBECK

*Vince asked me to go to the picnic  
We left the kids with my mother  
I don't know what they'll do now  
They'll have to look after each other  
They'll have to look after each other.*

KOLAR

*Today I die alone*

ALL THE DEAD

*Falling away  
Slowly sinking  
Descending and ending  
Spinning, shrinking  
Falling away Sinking  
from view  
Falling like stars  
And thinking of you  
Gravity doing what it does best Pulling  
us down till we come to rest and  
I just want to know  
Was there a sign,  
Something that they missed?  
A hole in the hull?  
A missing screw?  
Or something far more obvious  
Too much water?  
Too much weight?  
The will of God?  
Just tell me straight  
If this is my last goodbye  
At least give me  
The how and the why*

BOY

Sir? We've run out of caskets!

OTTO

Well go and find something, use ambulance baskets!  
*(to himself)*  
Father said that after the Fire  
They ran out of room for the burned, the charred  
But it's barely noon and we've already  
More than doubled those numbers by far.

*Lights up on ATTORNEY questioning PEDERSEN.*

*PEDERSEN is confused, seeming to be in past and present at once: answering the ATTORNEY in the courtroom and the FIREMAN back on the boat.*

*(MUSIC 11: IT'S COMPLICATED)*

*<< TRACK 11 >>*

ATTORNEY

Captain, the morning of July 24, 1915, *The Eastland* was tied up between Clark and LaSalle, is that right?

FIREMAN (*overlapping ATTORNEY*)  
Are you the captain?

PEDERSEN

That's correct.

ATTORNEY

And how many passengers were aboard?

FIREMAN

How many people were on board here?

PEDERSEN

2500, no more or less.

ATTORNEY

Had that many ever been onboard the ship before?

PEDERSEN

We had almost fifteen hundred just the night before.

ATTORNEY

But that's not 2,500, is it?

FIREMAN

Sir!?!

MALCOLM

Number One hundred and twenty-three

CHRISTINE

Woman One hundred and twenty-three

PEDERSEN

I left the numbers to the inspector –

ATTORNEY

But you signed the documents certifying the maximum number of passengers who could board the ship that day...

PEDERSEN

Yes sir, I did.

ATTORNEY

On what date did you sign that document?

FIREMAN

When did this thing go over?

PEDERSEN  
When did...?

ATTORNEY  
What date?

FIREMAN  
How long have people been down there?

PEDERSEN  
I...I...

ATTORNEY  
You don't remember when you signed it?

PEDERSEN  
It was --

FIREMAN  
Bring axes, ropes, poles, everything you got!

PEDERSEN  
*I know what you want  
But I'm not gonna do it  
What d'ye think  
I can't see through it?  
Sink my name  
In the stinking mud  
With that goddam ship,  
Come after my blood*

MUSICIAN 6  
Number 152.

MUSICIAN 3  
*(confirming)* Number 152.

PEDERSEN  
*You come after me  
With your facts and dates  
As if anyone  
Could keep it all straight  
As if any of those numbers  
Or dates even mattered As  
if they could fix  
The bones that were shattered  
What if I don't know the day it was dated?  
The number of passengers  
Was not my decision, it's indicated  
In the documents, they'll corroborate it  
And goddam it...  
It's complicated!*

ATTORNEY  
Now the Eastland already had a reputation of being somewhat unstable, did it not?

PEDERSEN

Not under my watch, / it didn't.

MUSICIAN 7

I can hear 'em down there screamin'!

ATTORNEY

And then some lifeboats were added to the *Eastland* that Spring, were they not?

FIREMAN

Grab a-hold! Can you grab a-hold?

ATTORNEY

Captain? How many lifeboats were added?

PEDERSEN

Lifeboats? We had 6, and we put an additional 5.

ATTORNEY

So almost twice as many. Would that be twice the weight?

FIREMAN

Hey we need some help here! Hey! (*Otto enters, runs to help FIREMAN*)

ATTORNEY

What about the concrete laid on the main deck for the 1915 season?

PEDERSEN

What about it? The old deck had rotted.

ATTORNEY

So the wood deck was replaced with concrete. Which, I assume, is heavier?

OTTO

Too goddamn heavy.

PEDERSEN

Well, of course, it's heavier.

FIREMAN

Or caught on something, maybe?

ATTORNEY

Between 30 and 57 tons heavier, correct?

FIREMAN

Miss, please, just hold on!

ATTORNEY

The additional lifeboats...the concrete deck...the additional passengers...who was keeping track of all these changes?

PEDERSEN

*I know what you want  
Someone to blame  
"Point me to him Tell  
me his name!"  
As if I knew  
What the day would hold  
So many bodies  
Would be laying out cold*

ATTORNEY

Several sources report that the boat tipped and leaned dramatically during the boarding...

PEDERSEN

Yes, we trimmed her up each time.

ATTORNEY

But despite all this tipping and leaning, at 7:24 you gave the "standby" order, ready to launch.

FIREMAN

She can't fit through. The porthole's too small.

PEDERSEN

Well, I wasn't excited at all when I rung up the standby!

ATTORNEY

You weren't "excited?"

PEDERSEN

No, I...you keep changing the—

MUSICIAN 7

Number two hundred and twenty.

MUSICIAN 8

*(confirming)* Man two hundred and twenty.

ATTORNEY

Captain Pedersen—

PEDERSEN

You think I don't feel the weight of each soul on top of my chest?

FIREMAN

We're going to have to cut into the hull.

ATTORNEY

Captain, many have testified that your behavior that morning—

PEDERSEN

You think I don't see 'em every night, when I try to get some goddamn rest?

ATTORNEY

--Sir, that your behavior that morning was erratic?

FIREMAN

You gonna help or you just gonna stand there?

*PEDERSEN is lost in the memory of the day.*

PEDERSEN

*It was not like*

*Anything I'd ever seen*

*My vessel on her side...*

FIREMAN

Hey!

ATTORNEY

Would you agree with that assessment?

PEDERSEN

*The women strewn from stern to bow...*

ATTORNEY

That your behavior was erratic?

PEDERSEN

*Some broken, some untouched somehow.*

*(A WELDER, above, begins cutting into the hatch of the deck)*

PEDERSEN

Here—HERE! Stop it! You're ruining the goddamn boat!

ATTORNEY

Captain?

WELDER

Who the hell might you be?

PEDERSEN

I'm the captain of this ship!



WELDER

There are people down below and my orders are to save lives, not be careful of boats.

ATTORNEY

Captain Pedersen? You didn't hear he screams from below the hull?

PEDERSEN

If one of those welders had cut the coal chamber, whole ship coulda blown up. Goddammit. You get up one morning, you go to work and then *this* happens.

*(to the ATTORNEY and OTHERS)*

You don't want to know the how and the why.

No.

*(Regaining some of his defiance and strength. Slower):*

*I know what you want*

*The smoking gun*

*Someone to tell you*

*Who is the one*

*Don't really care*

*If he's old or young,*

*Just give me the guy*

*Who needs to be hung*

*Well, I won't sit here and be berated*

*For problems someone else created*

*When this is over I'll be vindicated*

*'Cuz just like anything that God created...*

*It's goddamn complicated!*

MUSICIAN 5

*Harry Pedersen, sailed forty years*

*A captain almost twenty*

*Lived a life of smiles and tears*

*And troubles,*

PEDERSEN

*I've seen plenty*

*Well, I'm done with this city*

*Goin' back to my farm*

*In Michigan's where I'll be*

*I'm done with all of yeh*

*You can go to hell*

*You'll get nothin' more outta me.*

*You'll get nothin' more outta me.*

FIREMAN

*(laying down another set of wet clothes)*

Number 317.

OTTO

*(pins a number to the clothing)*

Girl 317.

FIREMAN

Almost 6 o'clock. That's what? Eleven hours. I'm gonna tell my boys to take a break. Can't be anybody left alive down there anyway.

*Lights up on BOBBIE. Still alone with just the sound of the boat and the water for her company. She is close to physical and emotional exhaustion.*

***(MUSIC 12: BE THE LEAF NOT THE STONE)***

**<< TRACK 12 >>**

BOBBIE

I can't...

I can't...

*(starting to lose it, calls out in vain)*

Oh Mama, I'm so sorry

I'm sorry I lost my hat

And I broke your favorite pitcher and spilled the milk

And I'm sorry I made fun!...

And Solveig, I shouldn't have been mean

And Uncle Olaf...

They said...

*(feeble)*

*They said there'll be...*

Oh, he said he'd tell them I'm here.

*(cries out)*

I'm here!!!!

*(angry despair)*

Oh I'm out!

I'm out of

I've run out of memories

I can't...

*Lights up on her FATHER.*

FATHER

Bobbie! Come now, min datter, give me your hand.

BOBBIE

What?

FATHER

Soon we will cross the ocean. You need to know how to swim.

BOBBIE

Why?

FATHER

Just in case.

BOBBIE

I don't want to cross the ocean! I like it here. And besides, this is a river.

FATHER

River, lake, ocean – water is water, and swimming is swimming. Come on now, in you go!

BOBBIE

No!!! I don't want to!

FATHER

*(a little resigned sigh)*

Alright, alright, *min datter*. Now look:

BOBBIE

*He picked up a stone, small, and grey*

*And tossed it, lightly, a few feet away*

FATHER

See? How fast it sinks, just like that, it's under and gone?

Now: look at this leaf.

BOBBIE

*It's wide and still green,*

*It hits the water, and sails in the breeze*

FATHER

That's what you want to be, open, spread out wide like that, riding on the surface.

FATHER

*Open out*

BOBBIE

*He said*

FATHER AND BOBBIE

*Be the leaf, not the stone*

FATHER

*Just float there on top You*

*can bounce on your own*

BOBBIE

*But I never could bounce*

*Could never just float*

*With too many worries  
Stuck deep in my throat  
The current so strong  
Would pull me down  
To the stony cold bottom  
Where surely I'd drown  
But Father was stern  
When he gave his reply*

FATHER  
*Come on,*

BOBBIE  
*He said*

FATHER AND BOBBIE  
*I know you can try*

BOBBIE  
I can't.

FATHER  
You're worrying too much, Bobbie! Too much thinking, always!

BOBBIE  
I'm sorry.

FATHER  
*(a disappointed sigh)*  
Maybe next time.

*Lights down on FATHER.*

BOBBIE  
*Then off to this country that I'd never seen  
Over across the Great In Between  
And before we know it, Father is gone  
And Mama and Olaf do their best to go on*

*Lights up on OLAF.*

OLAF  
Come on, everyone, we've got to get outside. We're going to the lake! Today! Now!!!

BOBBIE  
I don't want to go!

OLAF

What are you saying? It's a beautiful day. And this beautiful lake is right here!

BOBBIE

No!

OLAF

Are you scared?

BOBBIE

No, I'm not scared.

OLAF

So, then? What?

BOBBIE

I don't know how.

OLAF

*(taken aback)*

My brother didn't teach you?

BOBBIE

He tried...

OLAF

Ah. OK. I'll show you.

BOBBIE

*And the sky so clear*

*And the blue of the water is a perfect mirror*

*And his hands keep me afloat*

*I feel light and steady as a boat*

OLAF

That's it, Bobbie.

BOBBIE

*And his voice above the water*

*Is strangely but happily just...*

*Like Father's.*

*Lights back up on FATHER, watching OLAF teach BOBBIE how to swim.*

OLAF

That's right, you can do it.

*Open out, just lie back*

FATHER AND OLAF

*Be the leaf, not the stone  
Soon you'll be able to do this alone*

BOBBIE

I want to go back.

OLAF

Stop worrying.

FATHER

Too much thinking, always.

BOBBIE

What about Solveig?  
*(slipping back into the present)*  
Oh, Solveig...

OLAF

She's building sand-castles. Now look, see how you're sinking? Because you're worrying.  
*Just uncurl your body, you've got to let go.*

FATHER AND OLAF

*Relax and uncurl...*

FATHER, OLAF, AND BOBBIE

*Be the leaf, not the stone...*

*Lights dim on FATHER AND OLAF.*

BOBBIE

*(but starting to fail, despite herself)*  
But here I can't breathe  
And I can't lie back...  
Oh papa, I'm sorry!  
It's not true, it's not.  
Even a leaf will sink to the bottom  
Even a leaf will sink  
Nothing stays forever afloat  
No matter what anyone says or thinks  
And I'm not a leaf  
I'm just a stone

ILSE AND BOBBIE

And here I'm going to die alone  
Here I'll die alone.

*Lights dim on BOBBIE and ILSE. Lights up on REGGIE, under water*

*(MUSIC 13: REGGIE 3)*

## &lt;&lt; TRACK 13 &gt;&gt;

REGGIE

*Drop like a stone**To the deep deeper down*

HOUDINI

One-thirty-six, one-thirty-seven

REGGIE

*Human Tadpole**Where's her son?**Human Frog*

C'mon, just

One more, goddamit!

*Saw a pretty young woman**Reach for help**Fat man behind**Climbs from below**Grabs her dress**And down they go*Goddamit, who *does* that?

C'mon, Reggie

Eyes open, mouth shut

REGGIE AND HOUDINI

One-fifty-three, one-fifty-four

REGGIE

Nothing down here

*Back up towards the up**To the green greener--*

Wait. Stop.

*A flash of gold**Boy of seven**Maybe eight**Around his neck**Shining like**A firefly**A Gold medallion**Oh mama**You were wrong**Jesus Christ**Is merciful But**not today*

Still and all

She'll be glad

To have him back  
Even if  
It's just to bury

HOUDINI  
Uh oh, Reggie...

REGGIE  
Oh dammit! Damn it!

HOUDINI  
Lost your count.

REGGIE  
Lungs too tight

HOUDINI  
I'm disappointed.

REGGIE  
Where's the daylight!

HOUDINI  
Lost your focus

REGGIE  
Go up for air...

HOUDINI  
Your concentration

REGGIE  
Gotta get there!

HOUDINI  
You're not going to make it.

REGGIE  
Gotta bring him ---

HOUDINI  
A shame, such a shame...

REGGIE  
-- back!

*REGGIE pulls himself up onto the dock, gasping, panting.*



*He hands the boy's suit of clothes to the FIREMAN*

REGGIE

I've got another. Here. Take him.

FIREMAN

Boy Three Ninety-Six.

OTTO

Boy Three Ninety-Six.

*(MUSIC 14: HOUDINI'S WALTZ)*

<< TRACK 14 >>

REGGIE

That one... was more... than three minutes.

HOUDINI

I don't know, Reggie, you lost your count.

REGGIE

But we both know it was!

HOUDINI

Maybe.

OTTO

Boy three-ninety-six?

HOUDINI

*Maybe* you and I know that, Reggie. But does anyone else? Will anyone else ever know?

REGGIE

But, I...

HOUDINI

*So sad, Reggie Bowles*

*But it doesn't matter*

*If you beat my record or not*

*The Great Houdini*

*Shall live forever!*

*While you will be forgot*

REGGIE

But I found him, I found the boy!

HOUDINI

Yes! Dead!

REGGIE

*(slumps, totally deflated)*

I know.

*(rebutts)*

Don't bringing up forty bodies count for something?

HOUDINI

Well, sure it does!

*Well, Well done, Reggie Bowles*

*You'll have one day of fame*

*Then your memory will vanish in fog*

*In just a few years*

*No one will know*

*The brave deeds of the Human Frog*

*Just like the boat*

*You pulled them from*

*Your name will vanish in mist*

*While forever*

*We live on*

*Who are by fortune kissed*

*So goodbye, Reggie Bowles*

*Good work today*

*I hope you enjoyed your swim*

*But your fame's come and gone*

*Now it's time to move on*

*And so your brief spotlight dims...*

*Light go out on HOUDINI. Reggie sits, dejected. Suddenly, he sits up and gasps..*

REGGIE

Wait, wait!

*REGGIE's about to dive back in. The FIREMAN grabs him by the shoulder.*

FIREMAN

Whoa! Time to knock off, son. Let the professionals take over.

REGGIE

No, wait! There's someone else! There's somebody else! C'mere! Come on, follow me!

Hurry!

OTTO

Boy three ninety-six?

*Lights up on ILSE, alone, in the water. She has almost nothing left.*

**(MUSIC 15: ILSE PART FOUR)**

**<< TRACK 15 >>**

ILSE

*And one summer evening  
When you're older  
I know this might  
Seem strange to hear  
But you'll be a man  
My William dear,  
And the light may shift  
And the clouds may clear  
And someone's laugh  
Will pierce you through  
And their smiling eyes  
Will shine on you And  
then you might  
Find you're in the most  
Extraordinary light*

*Her strength finally gone, she lets go of whatever piece of stray debris has been keeping her afloat, and drops below the surface.*

*OTTO retrieves her dripping clothing and lays them on the hull of the boat. He notices THE GROCER watching. Their eyes meet.*

OTTO

Are you family?

GROCER

*(shakes his head)*  
A friend.

*ILSE, now dead, emerges and sees both her own body and the GROCER. To both:*

ILSE

*The rest of forever  
We spend alone.  
Before life, and after,  
Our bodies and bones  
Go spinning adrift  
In endless space  
We just have this one  
Quick chance to embrace  
This one brief blink  
To be held and to hold  
Before we're all back out in the cold*

*OTTO pins a tag to ILSE's clothing.*

OTTO

Woman 844.

*(MUSIC 16: A SMALL MYSTERY)*

## &lt;&lt; TRACK 16 &gt;&gt;

## REGGIE

*For days afterward, a small mystery A  
 tiny footnote to this strange history:  
 Lying among the dead and the maimed  
 A perfect little body remains unclaimed  
 Perhaps once prone to mischievous tricks  
 Now simply known as:  
 Boy Three-Ninety-Six...*

## MUSICIAN 7

*No one knew his face or his name  
 Or why his parents never came  
 To find this boy with the prominent ears,  
 Thin-boned, perhaps of seven years  
 But where was his mother? Did nobody tell her?  
 Until, one day, an old woman came by.*

## GRANDMOTHER

*Sorry to trouble you, but my  
 Neighbor's boys told me they'd been  
 Down here to the parlor  
 They said they'd seen  
 My William here, my dear grand-baby  
 I don't want to see him  
 Just tell me if maybe...*

*(She holds out a small pair of Knickerbocker pants)*

*His picnic suit  
 It came with two pair  
 So if these match*

*The ones that he's wearing...*

*OTTO looks to her grandson's clothing, now suspended in the air and dripping. She follows his look, then collapses.*

## MUSICIAN 7

*She didn't need proof.  
 She already knew.  
 His parents were lost  
 And now the boy, too.  
 All on the boat,  
 As she soon explained:  
 Of the whole family  
 Only she remained.  
 But now, at least, the boy had a name.*

OTTO

Boy three ninety-six.

GRANDMOTHER

William Novotny.

*As the MUSICIANS gather onstage for Only The River Remains, they lower and retrieve the dripping suits of clothing and lay "the bodies" downstage.*

***(MUSIC 17: ONLY THE RIVER REMAINS)***

***<< TRACK 17 >>***

MUSICIAN 4

*Wasn't no one rich or famous  
On that boat when it went down  
Only dusty men with dusty books  
Know or care who drowned*

MUSICIAN 3

*But stories and secrets were lost just the same  
And glorious details of triumphs and shames*

MUSICIAN 8

*And when in the end that final river is crossed*

MUSICIANS 3 & 8

*What does it mean if all that is lost?*

*We see REGGIE and another MAN ABOVE.*

REGGIE

She's down here! Quick! Hey! Hey!

*A SOUND from above. A large metal plate is removed from the hull of the boat. A shaft of light shines down on BOBBIE, and a rope is lowered towards her.*

BOBBIE

Hello? Hello?

FIREMAN (ERIK)

I see her! I see her!

REGGIE (*from above*)

I told you she was down there! Hold on!

*She grabs the rope and clings to it, as they lift her out.*

BOBBIE

I'm here! I'm here! Mama! Solveig! Uncle Olaf!

FIREMAN  
Grab a-hold!

REGGIE  
Just hold on!

*As BOBBIE slowly ascends.*

MUSICIAN 2  
*Only the river remains  
Everything else fades away  
All of our losses and all of our gains  
Gone at the end of the day*

BOBBIE  
The sky! The sky!

ALL  
*And only the river remains  
The river remains  
Ain't no heaven above  
Ain't no fire down below  
And this whole damn thing is over  
Far faster than we know  
The photos will fade and the pages will rot  
All of us here will soon be forgotten  
The rest of us rises like smoke, like steam  
Gone in a flash like a dream.  
And only the river remains  
Everything else fades away  
All of our losses and all of our gains  
Gone at the end of the day  
And only the river remains  
The river remains.  
Only the river remains  
Everything else fades away  
Our fallings and failings, our hopes and our fears  
The lies and the cries and the laughter and tears  
Every secret and memory we've held through the years  
Gone at the end of the day  
And only the river remains  
The river remains*

*BOBBIE comes to join the Company.*

BOBBIE  
*So all we can do  
Beneath these poor stars  
Is sit and tell each other  
These stories of ours  
Sing them aloud*

*In pitiful chorus  
The stories of all those  
Who've gone along before us  
But tell me, is there any better way to pass the time?  
Is there any better way to pass the time?*

*Lights down on the Company.*

THE END