The Legend of 1900 script

MAX: I still ask myself if I did the right thing, abandoning his floating city.

I don't just mean for the work.

The fact is, a friend like that

a real friend,

you won't meet again

if you decide to go on land,

if you just want to feel something solid under your feet

and then you no longer hear the music of the gods around you.

But, like he used to say:

"You're never really done for as long as you've got a good story

and someone to tell it to."

The trouble is that no-one would believe a single word of my story.

It happened every time that someone would look up and see her.

It's difficult to understand.

I mean, there were more than a thousand of us on that ship,

travelling rich folk, immigrants,

strange people and us.

Yet, there was always one, just one

who would see her first.

Maybe he was just sitting there eating

or walking on the deck.

Maybe he was just there fixing his pants.

He'd look up for a second, glance out to sea

and he'd see her.

Then he'd just stand there, rooted to the spot, his heart racing.

And every time, I swear every damned time,

he'd turn towards us, to the ship, towards everybody and scream...

America!

I lost a lot of money betting on who'd be the first to see her,

America.

FLASHBACK:

It's a miracle, Santa Rosalia!

What do you mean Santa Rosalia, it's the Madonna di Lourdes!

MAX: The one who sees America first. There's one on every ship!

And don't be thinking it's an accident or some optical illusion.

It's destiny.

Those are people who had that precise instant stamped on their life.

And when they were kids, you could look into their eyes

and if you looked carefully, you'd already see her,

America.

I've seen a few Americas!

Six years on that ship, five crossings a year:

Europe, America and back. Always soaking in the ocean.

When you stepped on land you couldn't even piss straight in the john.

It was steady, the john I mean,

but you'd keep bobbing like an idiot.

You can get off a ship all right, but off the ocean...

SCENE: PAWNSHOP:

Pawnbroker: I was just closing. What can I do for you?

MAX VOICEOVER: When I boarded I was twenty-four years old,

and only cared about one thing in life: playing the trumpet.

MAX: I'm selling it.

A Conn.

Not bad.

Best brass money can buy!

Could be, in its day.

Been a while since you played, eh?

If you mean for money, a couple of years.

But I've never stopped playing it to get rid of the blues.

Don't get me wrong...

The greatest jazz players blew through brass like that.

I'm sure they did, but after the war, people want sweet sounds.

They want bright sounds, forget jazz!

This now, is just a collector's item.

Nine pounds fifty, not a penny more.

Christ, that's only 9 or 10 dollars!

That horn's my whole life.

Okay, no-one's going to remember me like Buddy Bolden or Satchmo,

but even as a nobody I'm worth more than 9 lousy dollars!

PAWNBROKER: If you put it like that, I don't think it's worth even half a crown!

Shut the door when you leave, please.

MAX: Okay, Pops, you win!

You just bought yourself a piece of musical history.

PAWNBROKER: If you want some advice,

go out now and get something hot to eat.

MAX: At least let me play it one last time.

I don't have time to waste!

All right.

Hurry up though, I'm closing.

Thank you.

Two peas in a pod, wouldn't you say?

Are you all right? Please don't faint in here.

It's the music that you just played. Don't you recognise it?

What is it?

It doesn't have a name.

Only a handful of people have had the privilege of hearing it.

What style!

I've been wondering since this morning,

but I can't work out who this amazing piano player is.

I don't think you've ever heard of him.

Who is he?

If I told you that this pianist never existed, I wouldn't be lying.

I don't like secrets. They're like dirty underwear!

Come on, Yank, who the devil is playing?

It's my secret.

It was the first year of this frigging century,

as defined by an unknown coloured coal stoker on the Virginian.

Rich ass bastards! Only lose dirty handkerchiefs and cigarette butts!

Never a watch, even a dented one, or an odd cuff-link.

Not even a fake fucking ring!

Hey, look here, a whole cigar!

Must have been some rich pauper at the party.

Look at this shit! Damn rich!

They never forget anything, except when they owe you money.

What the hell are you doing here?

T.D. Lemons.

Hello, Lemon!

Immigrant business!

Give birth in secret somewhere on deck

and then leave on the ship another mouth to feed!

That's big trouble with the immigration office!

What can a kid like him be when he grows up? Another immigrant!

Don't listen to those bastards. Go on, lap it up boy!

It's milk.

They left this one in first class hoping some rich guy would take him

and give him a happy life.

- lsn't that right, Danny? - What do you think?

And who does the little ape get instead? A poor worthless nigger!

Fuck poverty, you stinking sewer rats!

T.D. was written on the box, do you rats know what that means?

I forgot, you can't read!

I'll tell you what it means, it means Thanks Danny!

They left that boy for me and I'm keeping him.

- What are you going to call him? - That's a problem.

I didn't think of that.

To start with, I'll give him my name, Danny Boodman.

Then I'll put T.D. in the middle like the rich put on their cuff-links.

It's classy to put letters in the middle of a name.

All the fucking lawyers have got them in the middle of their names.

One of mine was called John P.T.K. Wonder.

- The one who sent you to jail? - What a good memory you've got!

If my son grows up to be a lawyer, I'll kill him!

But his name's going to be Danny Boodman T.D. Lemon.

- What do you think? - It's up to you. You're his mother!

I like it, but it's short. It needs an ending.

He ain't no duke's son, Danny!

You found him on a Tuesday, call him Tuesday!

That's a good idea for a stupid nigger!

I found him the first month of the first year of this new century,

so I'm calling him Nineteen Hundred!

- But that's a number! - It was, but now it's a name.

Danny Boodman T.D. Lemon Nineteen Hundred!

Qick, the baby!

Stop that cradle.

How can something that small shit so much?

Lemon Nineteen Hundred. Shake him, shake him.

Nineteen Hundred's lucky, he was born in shit!

Thanks Danny?

Thanks Danny?

It was like the second coming of Christ.

Maybe it was, with all the miracles that kid had up his sleeve.

Hell, he did everything on the water but walk.

And I heard that he'd done that too.

And that's how little Nineteen Hundred grew up

inside that cradle as big as a ship.

Danny was afraid that they'd take him away because of documents and visas,

so the boy lived his early years hidden away

in the belly of the Virginian.

Now try by yourself.

Push your finger against these words so the letters can't run away!

- Man... - Okay, Lemon.

Go...

- Ma... - Just a bit more.

Ma.

You read like a god, Lemon!

Now put them all together like the boiler valves.

Go on.

Man-go-Mama!

Right, keep going.

Ya-nk my ch-ain.

Danny, why are you laughing so much?

These are the names of horses. I'm crazy about horses names.

Read there, that one ran yesterday at Cleveland.

Ha-ppy Hoo-fers.

- I'm pissing myself! - Listen to this one.

- Sa-ssy La-ssy. - Sassy Lassy!

And this one, Red Hot Mama.

What's a mama, Danny?

A mama?

It's a horse!

- A horse? - A race horse.

Mamas are thoroughbreds, the best race horses in the world.

If you bet on a mama, you always win.

Dan, put your finger here and read.

T.D. doesn't mean Thanks Danny.

Who's this pansy?

That's enough reading for tonight. Too much reading's bad for you!

What else is bad, Danny?

Everything off the Virginian is bad.

Everything.

They've got sharks on the land that will eat you alive. Be careful!

See this here.

That was those white sharks.

What's an orphanage?

It's a big prison where they lock up folks with no kids.

So if it wasn't for me, they'd put you in an orphanage.

You bet, little Lemon. Go to sleep now.

On that extraordinary floating city, apart from a father,

Nineteen Hundred found a whole family made of truly unique people,

Iike the ship's doctor.

Open your mouth, like this.

Shit, doctor, what's that hanging from your throat? Are you ill?

What's your name, doctor?

Dr Klausermanspizwegensdorfentage.

What a name! If they had to call you quickly, they've had it!

That circus of cooks, sailors, radio operators and waiters

all looked after him.

Everyone tried to give him what they thought was a good education.

Even the ship's Captain, in his way, ended up being part of the family.

Captain Smith, a wise man, had only three defects :

he suffered from claustrophobia, had a horrible fear of drowning

and hated sweets.

Nineteen Hundred, how many times have I told you not to come up here?

Especially if it's to steal!

Put the booty back where you found it and return to your den

or I'll send you to the orphanage!

Mr Boodman, this orphan business must come to an end!

It's even against the law.

Fuck the law!

Hey, Mick, what do you think about in the middle of a storm?

What? Do I think my lawyer should never have been born?

Yes, the storm.

You bet he was warned, then I blew off his head!

You think of jam and bread?

Yes.

Know what I think, Mick? I think you're loco!

I have gusto?

Danny, tell Pedro how I cut that lawyer's head off!

The Warldorf? I've never been there.

The whites would only let me in to clean the shit out the toilets!

Watch out!

- Danny! - Run, quickly!

- Get out the way, let me see. - Call a doctor.

The doctor, quickly.

Danny, don't move.

- Hold on. - It's just a pat on the back.

Hang on, the doctor's coming.

Doctor Kla-Kla-Klaus...

Klau-Klauserman!

Klausermanspizwegens Frischerri... Kemmanschov...

Qick on the Trigger was in the lead

over Holy Shoot and...

Times were Good,

Saucy Bossy,

Brave Victory,

Regrets Only,

Blue Balls Running,

and Hurricane over Open Sesame

was past the post in Chicago.

It took three days for old Danny to go.

He let go on the sixth race in Chicago, won by Drinkable Water

by two lengths over Vegetable Soup and five over Blue Foundation.

Dr Klausermanspizwegensdorfentage

declared that if it hadn't been for the belly laughs,

Danny probably would have survived.

But history isn't made of "ifs". The only thing we know for sure

is that suddenly,

Lemon Nineteen Hundred became an orphan for the second time.

Music.

Nineteen Hundred was eight years old then.

He'd made the trip between Europe and America about fifty times.

The ocean was his home.

Sure, and his skin was covered with scales and he had fins, not arms!

It's all true, Pops.

- You can bet your soul on it. - But that's absurd!

That's right.

He never set foot on dry land. Never.

He'd seen it from the ports many times, but he never got off the ship.

The only trouble was that as far as the world knew, he didn't even exist.

There wasn't a city, a parish, a hospital, or baseball team

that had his name anywhere.

He didn't have a country, a birth date, a family.

He was eight years old, but officially, he'd never been born.

America!

America!

Kidnapping.

Charges of kidnapping could be brought against you, Captain,

if one day the boy's kin were to show up.

After eight years, I seriously doubt it.

However, I think the time has come to allow the boy to have a normal life.

I've written a personal note I'd like you to give to the orphanage head.

Very well, Captain. Where is the lad?

Boatswain, show these gentlemen the way.

Forward.

Slowly.

Search everywhere, upstairs too.

What's in that case? Stop the baggage being off-loaded.

- Have you seen a little boy? - No.

22 days later, when the Virginian headed for Rio de Janeiro,

Nineteen Hundred hadn't been found and no-one knew anything about him.

Everyone had death in their hearts

because they had all gotten attached to the little boy,

although no-one would say so.

- Captain! Wake up! - Let me sleep.

- Come with me, quickly! - Christ!

- Are we sinking? - Worse than that!

- What's his name? - Nineteen Hundred.

- Not the song, the boy. - Nineteen Hundred.

Like the song!

Captain Smith would have liked to ask him many questions right then.

For example : "Where the hell did you learn to play the piano?"

Or : "ln what damn hole were you hiding?"

Or else : "Where in Christ's name are you getting this music from

which seems to enter into your veins?"

But he was a man in uniform.

He only managed to say : "All of this is against the regulations."

Fuck the regulations!

His exact words : "Fuck the regulations!"

But I don't understand what the record has to do with any of this.

You're not the sharpest knife in the drawer, Pops. That's his music.

The music of Danny Boodman T.D. Lemon Nineteen Hundred.

The greatest ivory tickler on the seven seas.

That's amazing!

If that's all true, this record must be worth a fortune!

This record can make us both rich.

That record shouldn't exist.

The only existing matrix was destroyed right after it was cut.

Well, this is a matrix.

It's one of those that they used for on the spot recording.

How did you find it?

I spent a whole day trying to put the pieces together.

I found them by accident, hidden inside one of those two pianos.

I bought them from a second-hand dealer

who emptied out an old hospital ship down at Plymouth.

They're going to destroy it in a couple of days.

What do you mean "destroy"?

- Where's the old hospital ship? - That's it.

Thank you.

- Where are you from? - Liverpool.

- I'm a barber. - Sign there.

Next. What's your trade?

- I'm a cook, barber, tailor. - Too many things for us, out!

- I'm also a good mechanic. - Get out! Next.

- What do you do? - I play the trumpet.

We've already got musicians on board. Get out!

Next.

Where the hell's he going?

- What was that? - I don't know.

When you don't know what it is, it's jazz!

Jazz!

- What's your name? - Max Tooney.

Okay!

It was the happiest day of my life.

All those people with hope in their eyes,

the goodbyes, the sirens and that floating world starting to move.

It felt like one big party just for me.

But just three days later the ocean got tired of the festivities.

Suddenly, in the middle of the night, she went berserk and hell broke out.

Now, a guy blowing a trumpet on a ship

can't do much when there's a raging storm.

Not playing the trumpet is all he can do not to complicate matters.

But I couldn't bear being down there.

The same line kept raging in my head : "he died like a rat."

And I didn't want to die like a rat.

Damn it, I'm lost!

Conn, what's the problem?

Have you lost your sea legs?

You're the new trumpet man, aren't you?

You blow a Conn, right?

Come with me. I have a cure for your misery.

Follow me.

- Take the brakes off. - But that's crazy!

Trust me. Go on, take them off.

Come and sit near me.

- You're really nuts! - Get on now or you never will.

- Tell me, have you got children? - No.

Shit, they'll lock you up in an orphanage one of these days!

He's nuts.

- Whoa, Mama! - I see you know your horses.

- A little. - Good man!

It was like the sea was rocking us and while we were floating around

brushing the lamps and furniture,

I realised that what we were really doing

was dancing with the ocean. Perfect, crazy dancers,

Iocked in a joyful waltz on the golden parquet of night.

Want some? Cheers!

Hallo, Captain.

- Care to go for a ride? - Nineteen Hundred!

Who else on this ship would do anything as crazy as this?

I was just experimenting, sir.

When I've perfected it, it won't happen again.

For me it's a question of brakes. Fix those and away you go!

- How much will that window cost? - I don't know, it was huge!

We're going to be shovelling coal on this ship for ever!

Oh, shit!

At least you know what you'll be doing when you grow up!

You'll shovel lots of coal.

- Hey, Conn. - What?

- You're from New Orleans, right? - How did you know that?

- I love that town. - How come you know it?

In the winter, it's beautiful.

And in March

there's always an afternoon, when you least expect it,

a roof of fog comes down, a barrier,

that hangs just below the street lamps and cuts everything.

Like a white sword. It's magic!

The houses lose their top floors, trees lose their branches,

St Louis Cathedral loses its spires and the passers-by their heads.

From the neck up, everything disappears.

All you can see in Jackson Square is a bunch of decapitated bodies,

stumbling about and greeting each other.

"Everyone all right at home?"

Wonderful! Too bad it doesn't last long.

But how do you know all these things?

Who knows?

You know,

ever since I've been on board, I keep hearing about this guy

with a name as long as a Georgia freight train.

Seems he was born on this ship and hasn't been off it since.

What a crazy story. Twenty years without ever setting foot on land.

Twenty-seven.

They say this guy makes music that's never been heard before.

I've heard of him, too.

At first, I thought it was you.

- But something didn't add up. - Of course.

I thought : "lf he's Nineteen Hundred how could he know New Orleans?"

I mean, you've been to New Orleans.

If I told you that I'd never set foot in that town, would you believe me?

Whoever you are, Max Tooney.

Glad to meet you.

Hey, you up there, we're supposed to blow it up

not wait for it to be eaten by the fish!

We're almost done, just laying the last charges.

- Where the hell are you going? - I have to look for someone.

- Do you want trouble? - I can't explain.

What did you want to do?

You bastards, let me on board!

Bastards!

- Can you repeat that? - Sure I'll say it again!

You're not going to blow up anything, 'cause my best friend's on that ship.

- You'd be responsible for murder. - Get him out of here.

- Get him out of here! - I'm not crazy, it's true.

If I say there's a man aboard the Virginian, it means there is!

We cleaned that ship from stem to stern, there's just lots of dynamite.

How can there still be a man on board?

If you've got proof, show it, because I'm the one who throws the switch.

I'm sure he's there.

I spent the best years of my life on the Virginian.

Did you find an upright piano in third class?

The Virginian is the only ship to have a piano in third class.

Was there or wasn't there an upright piano in third class?

There was a piano in third class, but it was horizontal.

What has any shaped piano got to do with a ghost aboard the ship?

There must be thousands of ghosts on a hospital ship!

Get out of here or I'll call the police.

Get your hands off me!

Amongst all those dead souls is the greatest piano player in the world!

A bloody piano player?

And were you tuning the strings all those years aboard the Virginian?

- What was I doing on the Virginian? - Yes.

What were you doing?

I played!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Fritz Hermann here welcomes you aboard the Virginian

and wishes you a pleasant evening with the Atlantic Jazz Band!

Well done!

Please, Nineteen Hundred, just the normal notes. Okay?

We played because the ocean is big and scary.

We played so that people wouldn't feel the time passing

and would forget where and who they were.

We played to make them dance, because when you dance you can't die.

We played ragtime, because that's the music God dances to,

when nobody's watching him, assuming that God is black!

End of the line boys!

Jesus, I must be a real sinner. Is that it, God?

This is music!

But it was in third class that Nineteen Hundred played his music.

He'd go in the afternoons or late at night,

when he didn't have to play the normal notes

and his music was made of notes that were everything but normal.

What the hell do you think about when you play?

What do you look at? Where does your mind go while you hit the keys?

Last night I was in a beautiful country.

The women had perfumed hair and everything glowed.

It was full of tigers.

He travelled and each time he ended up in a different place :

the heart of London, on a train in the middle of the country,

on the edge of a giant volcano,

in the biggest church in the world staring up at the crucifixes.

He travelled.

Hey, man, play us a tarantella!

Tell me how the tarantella goes, man!

The people getting off the ship would talk about a strange music

and a pianist who looked like he had four hands, he was so fast.

Weird tales circulated, some even true.

Like the one about Wilson, an American senator,

who used to travel in third class

to hear the music of Danny Boodman T.D. Lemon Nineteen Hundred.

America!

Why did you stop? Please, continue.

I'm sorry, Senator, I only play on the open sea.

- But that's absurd. - Ports are land.

- I don't play on land. - You've never gone on tour?

What does that mean?

Long trips on which artists

display their talents around the world. - That's all I do.

In my own way. Excuse me.

Would you grant me an interview?

- An inter... what? - An interview?

What's that?

The senator asks : "What do you like to do when you go back home?"

Nineteen Hundred : In Paris I love to wait at sunset

under the Eiffel tower, for the people who throw themselves off

and try to guess by their screams what country they're from

before they go splat all over the ground!

Why don't you get off just once? Why not? Just for once.

Why not see the world for yourself with your own eyes?

Have you ever thought about it? You could do anything you wanted.

You play the piano like a god, people would go crazy for you.

You could make lots of money and buy yourself a nice house.

You could have a family. Why not?

You can't spend the rest of your life travelling back and forth like this.

The world's out there. There's just a gangplank to go down.

What's a gangplank? Just a few stupid steps.

Christ, everything's waiting at the bottom of those steps.

Why don't you just get off?

At least once.

Why don't you get off?

Why? Why? Why?

Why? Why?

I think you land people

waste a lot of time asking yourselves why.

Winter comes and you can't wait for summer

and in summer you live in dread of winter.

You're always chasing some place you aren't, where it's always summer.

Doesn't sound good to me.

Hold it, stop everything!

- Tell them to unhook the detonators. - Unhook them!

You'd better pray that we find someone hidden here,

even somebody who can mistake a three-legged cockroach for a piano.

It's like looking for a needle in a haystack.

Come here, sir.

This was his cabin.

Forgive me for allowing myself in,

but your music was so strong.

Northern ltaly, I'll bet.

Well done, Friuli, to be exact.

But don't stop playing.

Want a butt?

You don't look happy about going to America.

It's not America.

It's everything I'm leaving behind.

Until a few years ago, my field was the only thing I knew.

The world started and ended there in that piece of land.

I'd never walked down the main street of a town.

Maybe you can't understand that.

I understand that perfectly.

I know someone who went through something very similar.

One fine day did his field go dry, too?

Did his wife run off with a priest?

Did the fever take his five children?

- No, but he ended up alone, too. - Then he's luckier than me.

I still have a daughter, the youngest one.

She survived.

It's for her that one day I decided to fight my bad luck.

I travelled the world without a destination.

Then one day, when going through one of the many towns I never knew,

I came to a hill, I climbed to the top and I saw...

My God, the most beautiful thing in my life.

The sea!

- The sea? - The sea.

I'd never seen it before.

I was like being hit by lightening.

Because I heard its voice.

- The voice of the sea? - Yes.

The voice of the sea.

I've never heard it.

It's like a huge shout, the voice of the sea,

that screams and screams and what it screams is :

"You!

Men with shit in your brains!

Life is immense! Can you understand that?

Immense!"

I'd never thought about it. I had a revolution in my head.

That's how I suddenly decided to change my life,

to start afresh.

Change life, start afresh.

Tell that to your friend.

Nineteen Hundred!

Nineteen Hundred!

- All we need is a talking ocean! - It's Max Tooney, your friend.

Come out, Nineteen Hundred, I'm a friend, too!

Even if we've never met. Don't worry, no cops!

Where was this piano exactly?

- It was... - It was over there, sir.

Nineteen Hundred!

Nineteen Hundred!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Fritz Hermann welcomes you aboard the Virginian

and wishes you a pleasant evening with the Atlantic Jazz Band!

On the violin, your own Fritz Hermann!

On bass, Freddie Loyacano!

Max Tooney on trumpet!

Jim Jim Breath Gallup on trombone!

Sam Scalisi on the drums!

On saxophone, Sam Sleepy Washington!

On banjo, Oscar Delaguerra!

And finally, on piano, Danny Boodman T.D. Lemon Nineteen Hundred!

The greatest!

- I'll ask you once more, just... - The normal notes, I know.

What are you doing here? Take your places!

End of the line!

You've really got it in for me, you son of a dirty nigger!

One night the public's not going to appreciate your antics.

That night, I swear, Nineteen Hundred,

I'll have you thrown overboard!

- Where do you get it from? - What?

- The music. - I don't know.

See that woman over there?

She must be German, look at her.

She look like someone, who with her lover, has just killed her husband

and is running off with the family jewels.

- Don't you think this music's her? - Sure, that's right!

And see that guy over there?

He looks like someone who can't forget.

His head is bursting with memories but he can't forget anything.

Listen to his music.

And her?

Couldn't she be a prostitute who's thinking of becoming a nun?

Incredible!

Now, look at this one.

See how he walks?

It looks like he's wearing someone else's suit by the way he wears it.

I'd say he's a stowaway slipped into first class

for a little amorous adventure. He's got America in his eyes.

He'll be the first one to see it. I can already hear him screaming.

Nineteen Hundred knew how to read.

Not books, anybody can do that.

He knew how to read the signs that people carry on them.

Places, sounds, scents,

their land, their story. Everything written on them.

He would read and, with infinite care catalogue, organise, and make order

in that immense map that he was drawing in his mind.

Maybe he'd never seen the world,

but for almost thirty years the world had been passing on that ship.

And for almost thirty years on that ship, he'd been spying on it

and he would steal its soul.

America!

I went into her room, she jumped on me

and I tore her clothes off. - Go on!

- Do you always make up this crap? - Sure!

Singleton, Lee Claire.

Hallo?

You don't know me, but I wondered if we might have a little chat.

A little chat? What are you talking about?

About anything you like, weather conditions, anything you choose.

Go to hell!

Hallo?

- Is that the race-track? - Yeah, you betting?

- Can you tell me if Mama's racing? - No, it's your sister!

- I think there's a misunderstanding. - Shove it up your ass!

The telephone should bring out the best in people.

I know who you are. If you don't stop calling, I come over and kill you!

Christ, he's already here!

Hey, are you the guy with that friggin difficult name?

Come on out, I'm talking to you.

Catch him!

Stop!

Where are you going?

- Hold still. - Stop, you idiot!

- Keep still, you son of a bitch! - Where are we, in hell?

- We don't want to hurt you. - Come on out. Where are you?

We're players, man, musicians.

Over there.

- Bon appetit! - Thanks, have you got some wine?

Are you the one that plays ten kinds of jazz rolled into one?

To tell the truth I've never counted them, I'm just a piano player.

- It's him. - Well, you'd better start counting.

The man who invented jazz sent us here.

- And what does he want from me? - He challenges you to a piano duel!

A piano duel?

What the hell is a piano duel?

It's a duel, with pianos instead of pistols.

It's a musicians thing. No blood, just a little hate.

Real hate, under the skin. It riffs like you never heard.

It could last all night and at the end, one would win.

Nineteen Hundred!

If I were you, I wouldn't be so sure he's still here.

If I know him at all, he won't be any place else.

I'm sure of that.

He must have gone. What would he have done here without a piano?

Besides, with the war, who knows?

He might not even be any longer in this dirty world.

Someone like him doesn't end up like everyone else.

- It's not his style. - Think what you like.

But I can't ask the owners to keep this carcass going

just because someone who doesn't exist is on board. I can't delay it.

Nineteen Hundred, it's Max. I have to talk to you!

- How did the duel end up? - It was in Boston.

The summer of 1 931. Jelly Roll Morton boarded the Virginian.

Dressed entirely in white, wearing a diamond as big as a meatball!

Even the garters on his socks were diamond studded.

Jelly Roll, what's the reason for a trip to Europe on a steamer?

Till now, you've only gone up and down the Mississippi!

I don't give a damn about Europe!

The only reason I'm going on this crappy ship is to meet a guy

they say tunes a good piano!

But I also heard that he doesn't want to set foot on land.

- Is he talking about me? - Sure he is.

One day some asshole says to me :

"Hey, Jelly, there's someone who plays the piano better than you."

So I says to myself : "Shit! How come this guy plays so good

when he doesn't even have the balls to get off the boat?

Damn it, Jelly, you were the one who invented jazz!

Then I says to myself : "You can afford to buy a first class ticket!

You can even buy the ship just by raising your little finger.'

Get a shot of it, boys!

- Tell the truth, are you scared? - I don't know.

Why a duel? What happens when you have a duel?

It seemed like he really didn't care much.

Like he didn't even understand it. But he was curious.

He wanted to hear how the devil the inventor of jazz played.

He really believed that the guy invented jazz.

I believe he thought that he could learn something new.

That's just how he was, a bit like old Danny.

He didn't have any sporting sense.

He didn't give a damn who won, it was the rest that amazed him.

It's true!

I believe you're sitting in my seat.

- You're the one that invented jazz? - That's what they say.

And you're the one who can't play unless the ocean's under your ass?

That's what I say.

Jelly Roll Morton didn't play, he caressed those notes.

It was like a slip sliding down a woman's body.

His hands were butterflies, so light.

He started off in the brothels in New Orleans, learning to stroke the keys.

People making love upstairs didn't want any uproar.

They wanted music that would slip behind the curtains, under the beds.

Without disturbing. He played that music there.

And in that, he truly was the best.

- Bravo! - Bravo!

It's your turn, sailor.

Go on.

What's he doing?

He's nuts!

Is it Christmas?

- Did he win? - No, they're just warming up.

Bravo!

- What's up, Nineteen Hundred? - This music makes me cry.

The whole crew bet on you!

I put a year's pay on the line and you're crying?

Start thinking about your music!

- Can I bet, too? - Betting on yourself isn't sporting.

But I want to bet on him! He's terrific.

- You're crazy! - But if you lose, I'll give it back.

It's the same music that the other one played.

We've already heard this!

He's fooling around.

- Did he lose? - Not yet.

Well done, Nineteen Hundred!

Stick this up your ass!

- Max? - Eh?

- Give me a cigarette, will you? - You're not doing too well!

- Just give me a cigarette. - You don't smoke!

What's wrong with you? You could lick this guy with one hand!

- Pardon me, I didn't catch that. - I didn't say anything.

Bravo!

- Where's this cigarette? - We'll be shovelling coal forever!

Just give me a fucking cigarette!

Clown!

Listen carefully.

You smoke it. I don't know how.

Well done! Bravo!

You're the greatest!

Divine!

- Did he win? - Yes, he won.

I knew he would!

Jelly Roll Morton spent the rest of that trip locked in his cabin.

When we got to Southampton, he got off the ship and returned to America.

I remember Nineteen Hundred watched him as he walked off the dock

and all he said was : "Fuck jazz, too!"

That's just what he said : "Fuck jazz, too!"

- What an incredible story. - Did I miss anything important?

- You could say that. - Damn!

- He'll fill you in later. - You bet.

He's really good at telling tales.

This is no tale, my friend!

Sure, I've done lots of stupid things in my life.

If you were to hang me upside down nothing would fall out my pockets.

I even sold my trumpet. Everything!

But not this story, I haven't lost that.

I've decided to tell it only because I want to save him.

But there's no-one here. Nobody! Understand?

It's because there are too many of us, we've scared him.

That's enough. Now, you leave this ship or I'll have you arrested.

Get back to work. Quickly!

- Give me one more chance. - Get lost, buddy.

At sunrise tomorrow this ship gets blown up!

And yet...

- Here it is. - Stop or I'll shoot!

- I've got you. - Hey, it's me.

Don't you recognise me?

- Oh, it's you! - Yeah, lower that canon, will you?

Sell your instrument and then steal it back, that's an old trick!

- I should have known you're a thief. - No, I was looking for this.

- What do you need that for? - It's a matter of life or death.

- I need a gramophone, too. - A thief and a liar.

- Pops, I don't have time to lose. - I do, seeing as I have a gun.

Now that I think of it, since when were records made on board a ship?

Impostor!

If your friend really did play that music, then he got off the ship.

- Right? - lmpossible, Pops.

Nineteen Hundred cut this recording personally

which for me is one of his very best works,

but to do it he didn't jump ship.

It was an extraordinary, unique event in the history of record-making.

You can't imagine the advantages you'll obtain

if this record sells. You'll become famous, Mr Nineteen.

- Can I call you Nineteen? - Is it painful?

Right, gentlemen, silence please. On the count of three.

One, two, three.

Wonderful, Mr Nineteen! An absolutely extraordinary piece.

Divine music, what's it called?

It's going to have people crying buckets.

It's got to have the right title, like : "Swinging in the breeze...'

You were great, as usual.

You're going to be big time.

If only you'd decide to take the big step.

- The big step? - Getting off!

Getting off these lousy planks and going after...

Going after fame and fortune.

But if you wanted, thanks to our record company, with this,

you could have the success you deserve without leaving this ship.

We'll print millions of copies.

The whole world could listen to your wonderful music, Nineteen.

Mr Nineteen?

I won't let my music go anywhere without me!

- Hey, no! Don't touch! - What are you doing? Is he mad?

We have a contract, you can't go back now!

I always go back.

Miss,

I'd be pleased if you...

Miss, I'd be...

I'd be pleased

if you would accept

this small token...

Hey, what are you doing there all by yourself, counting the waves?

The captain says we'll soon go through the Tropic of Cancer.

At last there'll be something to see.

The sea changes colour ten times a day.

Even more. I could stay and watch it for days.

The peasants don't watch the sea at all. They're scared.

That's not true.

My father told me once that he heard the voice of the sea.

Really? And what did it say?

I can't tell you, it's a secret.

- Secrets should be kept. - It's pouring, let's go, quickly.

Come on!

America!

Damn it, I wanted to say it!

Excuse me.

Excuse me.

Sorry.

- Miss! - Are you in a hurry?

Excuse me, miss.

I have to talk to you.

- You're meeting your father, aren't you? - Yes.

- How did you know? - I think I met him.

On this ship, quite a few years ago.

- I don't know if he took this ship. - I'm sure it was this one.

Did he have a fisarmonica?

We played together.

I don't know if he'd remember me, but say hallo to him.

All right, I will.

But how did you know who I was? It's very strange.

It's a secret.

And secrets should be kept.

Even if I think your father felt differently then.

- Move on, let me through. - Don't push!

I'd be really pleased if you would accept...

What?

I would like you to accept this small musical token.

- Good luck! - Thank you. Good luck to you, too!

Come and visit some day. We live on Mott Street, number 27.

- My father opened a fish shop! - Maybe.

He never mentioned her to me again, and I never asked.

At least not for the next twelve crossings.

Besides, he was happy, as always.

His popularity was at its peak.

None of us could have imagined what was smoldering beneath his happiness.

Then, one evening in spring, halfway between Genoa and New York,

right in the middle of the ocean,

- the painting fell. - Meaning?

Pops, have you ever asked yourself why paintings fall?

No, not really.

I've always been impressed by this thing about paintings.

- What's the painting got to do with this? - It does.

For Nineteen Hundred, that night went the way it does for paintings.

They hang there for years and then, without any warning...

They fall.

They're hanging there on that nail, no-one touches them,

but at a certain point...

Down they fall, in absolute silence.

With everything perfectly still around them.

Not even a fly moving around.

And they...

There's no reason. Why in that instant?

Who knows?

What happens to a nail

to make it decide that it just can't any more?

Does he have a soul, too, poor thing?

- Does he make decisions? - Let's sit down.

Did the nail discuss this at length with the painting?

Were they unsure about doing it? Had they talked about it for years?

Did they then decide on a date, a time, a minute, a precise instant?

Or did they both know about it from the start? Was it all set up?

- "I'm letting go in seven years.' - "That's fine with me.'

- "So it's all set for 1 3 May.' - "Okay.'

- "How about twelve noon?" - "Make it twelve forty five.'

- "All right.' - "So good night.'

Seven years later, on 1 3 May,

at twelve forty five...

It's impossible to understand.

It's one of those things that it's better not to think about!

When paintings fall, when you wake up one morning and you don't love her,

when you open a newspaper and read that war has broken out,

when you see a train and want to leave,

when you look in a mirror and realise you're old,

when one evening, in the middle of the ocean, Nineteen Hundred

Iooks up from his plate, looks me in the eye and...

Tomorrow, in New York, I'm leaving this ship.

I was flabbergasted.

Has the cat got your tongue?

No, I'm pleased.

But it's so sudden! Just like that!

Right, just like that!

Good! Finally!

I have to see something.

- What? - The ocean.

- The ocean? - The ocean.

You're pulling my leg? You've seen nothing else for 32 years.

From here. I want to see it from there, it's not the same thing.

Wait till we dock, lean over the side and take a good look.

No, it's not the same thing. You can hear its voice from the land.

You can't from a ship.

- What do you mean "hear its voice?" - lts voice.

The voice is... more than a big scream.

It tells you that life is immense.

Once you've heard it, you know what you have to do to go on living.

I could stay here for years,

but the sea wouldn't tell me anything.

But if I get off, live on land for a couple of years, I'd be normal,

Iike all the others.

Then one day I'll leave, get to a coast,

Iook up, see the ocean and I'll hear it scream.

I don't know who's been bullshitting you, or if you're making it up,

but I think the real reason you want to leave this ship

is that girl.

It's always a girl.

But even if that's not the reason, it's fine with me. Know why?

I've always wanted you to play for the people on land,

marry a nice woman and have children

and all those things in life which perhaps aren't immense

but are worth the effort.

You'll come and visit me, Max, on land?

Sure I will.

That way you'll introduce me to the mother of your children.

And invite me to lunch.

I'll bring the dessert and a bottle of wine.

You'll tell me that I shouldn't have bothered and,

while you're showing me around your house, shaped like a ship.

your wife will be cooking a turkey. Then we'll sit at the table.

I'll tell her she's an excellent cook

and she'll tell me that you often talk about me.

I want to give you my camel coat.

You'll cut a fine figure when you get down there.

You think I could have a family with a horse?

- Nineteen Hundred! - Hey!

I've seen so many people saying goodbye on the docks without caring.

But when I said goodbye to Nineteen Hundred, it was a real blow.

Look after yourself, all right?

Take care.

We laughed, we kept saying "see you soon",

but we knew we'd never see each other again.

There was nothing we could do about it, it had to happen.

And now it was happening.

How do you get off?

- Here he is. - Goodbye, Nineteen Hundred!

- Bye! - Don't forget us.

Wear your woollen vest.

Write to us sometimes.

Good luck!

- What's up? Did he step in shit? - Maybe he forgot something.

Perhaps he's forgotten why he's getting off.

What's he doing?

Whatever he saw from that damned gangplank,

what kind of thoughts crossed his mind standing up there,

he never told me.

- No, go away! - Wait!

I'll give you all the money I have, take it.

He was strange for a long time. He wouldn't talk to anyone.

He preferred to be alone for days and days.

He seemed taken up with very personal matters.

Then, one day while I was sitting at the bar...

Thanks for the coat, Max. It fit like a glove.

It was a real shame.

But I'm better now, it's all done with.

He looked like someone who wasn't kidding,

someone who knew exactly where he was going.

Like when he'd sit at the piano and start to play.

There were no doubts in his hands.

It was like the keys had been waiting for those notes.

It seemed like he'd made them up then and there,

but somewhere in his head, those notes had been written all along.

Nineteen Hundred on that day, had decided to sit at the keyboard

of his life and start playing his most absurd music.

That this music would have marked the rest of his days.

Look at that guy with the trumpet, he must be drunk or half crazy.

- Which one? - The trumpeter. He's crying!

I left the Virginian on 21 August, 1 933,

with my leave papers and back pay. Everything in order.

I knew that sooner or later I'd have been through with the ocean.

I heard no more about Nineteen Hundred and the Virginian.

Not that I ever forgot them. On the contrary.

During the war, I asked myself :

"Who knows what Nineteen Hundred would do if he were here,

who knows what he'd say.'

"Fuck war",he'd say!

But said by me, it wasn't the same thing.

A lot of time's gone by, maybe he's gone.

Maybe he went to Mott Street, to that girl.

Perhaps.

Hey, Conn, what's the problem? Did you lose your sea legs?

Where the hell did you find that record?

What have you been up to all these years?

- Making music. - Even during the war?

Even when no-one was dancing.

Even when the bombs were falling.

The music helped them get better.

The wounded, I mean.

Or else it kept them entertained,

as they slipped away into another world.

Sometimes they didn't even mind the voyage

if they could listen to the music.

Mine was the last face they saw.

I kept playing till the ship got here.

Call this a ship?

It's more like a mountain of dynamite about to explode.

A bit dangerous, don't you think?

And you, Max?

Where's your Conn?

I gave it up as well, a while back.

But now I'm in the mood for starting again.

I'm busting with new ideas.

Let's start a duo, you and me.

Or our own band :

The "Danny Boodman T.D. Lemon Nineteen Hundred Big Band!"

It gets the blood going! What a smash we'd be.

Come with me. Let's watch the big bang from the pier.

Then we'll start again from scratch.

Sometimes you have to go right back to the beginning.

"You're never really done for as long as you've got a good story

and someone to tell it to". Remember?

You told me that.

Imagine how many stories you've got to tell now!

The world would hang on your every word, they'd go mad for your music.

Believe me.

All that city...

You just couldn't see an end to it.

The end!

Please, could you show me where it ends?

It was all very fine on that gangway

and I was grand, too, in my overcoat.

I cut quite a figure

and I had no doubts about getting off.

No problem.

It wasn't what I saw that stopped me.

It was what I didn't see. Can you understand that?

What I didn't see.

In all that sprawling city, there was everything except an end.

There was everything.

But there wasn't an end.

What I couldn't see was where all that came to an end.

The end of the world.

Take a piano.

The keys begin, the keys end.

You know there are 88 of them and no-one can tell you differently.

They are not infinite, you are infinite.

And on those 88 keys the music that you can make is infinite.

I like that.

That I can live by.

But you get me up on that gangway

and roll out a keyboard with millions of keys,

and that's the truth, there's no end to them,

that keyboard is infinite.

But if that keyboard is infinite there's no music you can play.

You're sitting on the wrong bench.

That's God's piano.

Christ, did you see the streets? There were thousands of them!

How do you choose just one?

One woman, one house,

one piece of land to call your own, one landscape to look at,

one way to die.

All that world weighing down on you without you knowing where it ends.

Aren't you scared of just breaking apart

just thinking about it, the enormity of living in it?

I was born on this ship.

The world passed me by, but two thousand people at a time.

And there were wishes here,

but never more than could fit on a ship,

between prow and stern.

You played out your happiness on a piano that was not infinite.

I learned to live that way.

Land

is a ship too big for me.

It's a woman too beautiful.

It's a voyage too long. Perfume too strong.

It's music I don't know how to make.

I can't get off this ship.

At best, I can step off my life.

After all, it's as though I never existed.

You're the exception, Max.

You're the only one who knows that I'm here.

You're a minority.

You'd better get used to it.

Forgive me, my friend.

But I'm not getting off.

Max.

I can picture the scene up there.

Some poor guy searching a list for my name and not finding it.

- What did you say your name was? - Nineteen Hundred.

Niemann, Nightingale,

Ninestock, Nittledeen.

- You see, sir, I was born on a ship. - I beg your pardon?

Born, raised and died on a ship, maybe I'm registered there.

- Shipwreck? - No, six and a half tons of dynamite.

Are you feeling better now?

Yeah, fine except that I lost an arm.

- An arm? - Yes, in the explosion.

You should be able to find one up there.

- Which one do you say is missing? - The left, sir.

I'm so sorry!

We only seem to have two rights.

- Two right arms? - Yes.

I'm afraid so.

Would you mind awfully taking...

- Taking what? - A right arm instead of a left?

Well, all things considered, better a right arm than nothing at all.

I couldn't agree more.

By the way, we have one black arm and one white arm.

Oh, matching arms, please.

I have nothing against negroes, it's just a question of aesthetics.

It's no laughing matter, Max.

What a cock-up, spending eternity with two right arms!

How would you make the sign of the cross?

Max.

Imagine the music I could play with two right arms.

I only hope I can find a piano up there!

Okay, that's fine like that.

- Slowly. - Get hold of it there.

What would you have done in my place?

I don't know.

I would probably have felt quite useless.

Sooner or later all stories end, and there's nothing else to add.

Anyhow, thanks.

Conn, there's something I don't understand.

Who hid the broken record inside the piano?

- You're looking at him. - So, you weren't useless after all.

Conn.

Wait.

Here, take it. I think you'll need it.

- But l... - Fuck the money!

A good story is worth more than an old trumpet.

Okay, Pops.