

TESLA

a play in two acts

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first\draft
Banff Center
15 May 1985

Act One

New York: a hotel room: approximately the late 1930s.

The stage should suggest this hotel room without quite being the hotel room. Things such as bed, dresser, a roll-down writing desk, a window onto a skyline, a door, should be set in such a manner that most of center stage is open and available to fresh brief sets, other occasions. (The inter-splicing of other sets, times, will be done throughout acts one and two. The manner in which a hotel room disappears or fades can be a matter of lighting, curtains, or other stage emphasis. For some of the transitions, our dominant character, TESLA, may occupy a stool forestage and to the right while the stage behind him darkens, and the set transitions are made.)

The hotel room as such: a contradiction between its inhabitant and its squalor. The inhabitant, TESLA, is first seen sitting in an armchair, holding an injured pigeon between his hands. He is tall, archaically narrow, old. Biography places him at about 84. But nothing in his crisp, erect demeanor quite suggests senility. The contrary. He walks with an almost athletic stride and some of his motions can be dramatic and vivid. Yet he suffers the results of broken ribs that never healed properly and a peculiar sensitivity to tremors of a distant subway, or any vibrant forms of direct light. He is dressed in an impeccable pinstripe suit with tie and narrow shirtcuffs. It is a fashion he has not altered since the late 1890s. The suit shines.

The hotel room, by contrast, might suggest an aging Howard Hughes. Mounds of discarded tissues round the floor, especially near bed and desk and armchair. At the window, a special rigging of mesh and wire that can slide in and out the opening below the window. It is a kind of aviary, as can be witnessed in the droppings on the floor below it, the flutter of wings and cooings from within. The bed is unmade, the sheets are dirty. The desk is mounded in papers, unopened letters, unopened bills, some of which have slipped unheeded to the floor.

Pigeons are a backdrop and motif to the play but for stage purposes we only see one: the injured creature that Tesla holds in his hands as lights come up on the stage.

Since much of the play is monologic, a note on Tesla's voice: it is precise, perfect in its English, with a faint almost unidentifiable trace of an eastern European accent (in fact, Serbian). The text of what the voice says should feel old; the voice itself, though at times elegiac, stark, and even

bitter, should not feel so old.

Throughout the play, we will see this room by day and by night. The difference does not lie in lighting but in the window. By day it is heavily curtained with additional hotel towels draped over the birdcage. By night both birdcage and a night skyline (or perhaps simply the backside of a nearby apartment building) are visible through the window.

As the play opens, it is day. Tesla sits in his armchair, talking to a pigeon.

TESLA: It is cold for you? Is that a chill I feel? Here. Here. (holding the pigeon closer to his bosom) Already it is all the heat the management will give me. They say, Tesla, how can you keep a window open in January like this? But when they go out, they wear heavy coats of fur or leather. Not only...these... (stroking) ... light wing feathers. How can I tell them what it is to be cold in the winter? Hey, my little one? What the frost tastes to this soft breast? (a pause) It is cold here.

Still holding the pigeon, Tesla rises. He walks with a stoop. He crosses to a stageside washbasin. Beside it are stacked two fresh white hotel towels. On the floor lie a bundle of dirty, fallen towels.

TESLA: We will do what we can. Here. The sink is dry. I apologize. The porcelain too is cold.

Tesla sets the pigeon into the sink, then takes one of the fresh towels and crosses to the window. He strips away the towels that bundle it and opens the cage to set the towel down over the lower mesh just inside. Cooings and rustlings from within the cage.

TESLA: You must make your droppings now on this towel. Yes. They will be screaming again in annoyance downstairs. What is that? Pigeon shit? Get rid of that old crank who can't even pay his bill for December. There. It should be warmer for all of us now.

Tesla replaces towels over the cage, glancingly disturbing the curtain in the process. A shaft of sunlight falls over his face. He jerks from it, bracing himself against the cage. He grabs at a nearby box of tissues, sneezing harshly, twice. He lets the tissues fall. Then he closes the curtain tightly, and goes to the sink to retrieve the pigeon.

TESLA: Hello, my pet. I know. Cold in that sink. Maybe now, not so cold here in this room. It is me you feel shivering now, no? Not shivers, really. Do you understand how the sunlight vibrates? Hmm? Let me see your eyes. (holding the pigeon eye to eye)

Yes of course you do. Better than I ever will, perhaps.

Tesla stands, facing the audience, holding the pigeon to his breast again. Through an elision of which he is perhaps unconscious, he will cease addressing the pigeon, begin addressing the audience.

TESLA: For you it is such a natural thing, to go from shadow to sunlight. The glint of that light off a peanut or a carroway seed touches you...here... in your appetite, hey? For me, though...that tiny glint can make my mind rage, it sets my nerves on fire.

As Tesla addresses an audience rather than a pigeon, the stage darkens everywhere but over Tesla, holding the pigeon. The light on Tesla can be spotlight but it should be soft.

TESLA: I don't know why. All my life I have felt like a sensitive reservoir...a barometer to the slightest disturbances. Here. Here. (now specifically to the audience) Listen.

Distantly, almost as an echo, a subway passes.

TESLA: You heard that. But you didn't feel it. You didn't feel your nerves cringing, as if they were in danger of being crushed. Did you? You didn't feel the quiet inside your skull invaded by a terrible roar of chaotic vibrations. Did you? (a long beat) I am told by doctors who would know of such an ailment, that never have they known this ailment...except in me. So it has no name. It has no origin. It has no reason. Except in me.

Followed by the light, Tesla walks several paces to the left. He takes a stool.

TESLA: When I was 25, living in Budapest, I had my worst attack of it. Every vibratory tic and hum in that great city resonated like a blow inside my skull. A clock ticked in a building a block away. I felt it like a gong - gong- gong hammering in my brain. The watch of an orderly in the hall. A beam of sunlight no wider than this finger... Every mote of dust it touched seared a hole behind my eyes. I lay in bed for weeks, shaking, kicking, seized with the traffic of every vibration from a trolley to a carpenter's steady hammering. I am told my pulse would fall to almost nothing. Here and there, a feeble little throb. Then in an instant, it would

drive like a jackhammer through my veins, a hundred twenty, a hundred thirty-five, a hundred fifty. They all expected I would die. I remember only the need to have the mad traffic stop, leave me in peace! For that, yes, I think I would have died. (pause; then intimately) But had I died...I would have died... of what? Of a hyper-sensitivity to the rain of waves that beats on all of us, even now? Or of my inability to see what the beating of those waves could mean? I will give you an example.

Lights darken over Tesla, rise on a scientist at a blackboard, wearing a white lab smock and an attire suggestive of the 1870's in Germany. A motor lies before him on a table.

TESLA: Five years earlier, I was a student at the Polytechnic Institute in Gratz. My teacher was Herr Professor Poeschl. One day he demonstrated a Gramme machine. I was sitting eight seats back, in one of the middle rows, but when he turned on that Gramme machine...

Professor Poeschl snaps a switch. The machine hums, making wild sparks as it works.

TESLA: (o.s.) The sparks it made felt like firecrackers being flung into my eyes..

POESCHL: (in a lecturing mode) The Gramme machine. It can be a dynamo, converting work to electricity. It can be a motor, converting direct current into the turning of levers, the lifting of any load you wish. The future of mechanical science will rise from the shoulders of this machine. (pause, with clear reluctance; and a touch of scorn) Yes Tesla?

TESLA: (o.s.; a younger voice) But isn't all that sparking wasteful, sir?

A wave of delighted, anticipatory student laughter. Poeschl claps his hands, as if cheered by the nuisance question.

POESCHL: (with relish) Extravagently wasteful, my dear Tesla. Half of the energy is lost to those sparks. And the brushes themselves need replacing every ten or twelve hours. Much like the eggs you ate for breakfast, half the calories lost in the digestion. Much like that hair of yours, replacing itself...and...could use a combing one of these days.

Outright hilarity of the students. Enter Tesla, from right forestage, with younger, thicker hair and the gait and vitality of a twenty-year-old.

TESLA: May I use the board to elaborate, sir?

Poeschl snaps off the machine.

POESCHL: We don't want this distracting us, do we.

More ripples of laughter as Tesla goes to the board, sketches the following:

TESLA: (hesitantly) When...we talk of current, we speak of a river of electrons. This. A one-way flow. Yet the only way we can create that flow is through-- these. Whirlpools of magnetic force that spin in opposite directions.

POESCHL: (interrupting) Whirlpools, Tesla? Rivers? Next you'll be telling us-- (scooping up the wire to the machine) -- fish are coming up this wire to spawn, is that right?

Rollicking laughter, into which Tesla continues.

TESLA: We use the brushes to reverse the flow. That's what causes all the sparking. Sir, I'm suggesting that if these rotations give us electricity, they should give us an idea how electricity best moves. Not like a river. But like this.

Tesla adds to the diagram, as follows:

POESCHL: Alternating current. (tightly) How, Tesla? Aht You haven't worked that out.

Poeschl makes a flick of a gesture, dismissing Tesla; Poeschl demonstrates at the board.

POESCHL: Alternating current is one of the great schemes to which third-rate scientists devote a lifetime. Like the perpetual motion machine. Correct, Tesla?

TESLA: (o.s.) Sir, the nature of electricity--

POESCHL: ...Is a steady pulling force. Like gravity. Only you'd like to convert that into a rotary force. Correct?

The light comes up on the elder Tesla, sitting on the stool. Poeschl to dark.

TESLA: Yes, Professor Poeschl. As gravity already does, with the

TESLA: (a long beat) Yes. Correct. (to the audience) But you see, this is how so much of our science goes. Gravity is this. A law of pulling force. Rotation is this. A law of spin. So walled apart in our minds. When in nature, that force sets every planet wheeling. Why should electricity be any different?

Lights rise over the hotel room. Tesla rises from the stool and walks to the window. It is night now. He looks out at the skyline of Manhattan.

TESLA: (to the pigeon) Look. Look out there, my little one. Does it excite the yearning of your wings to see those lights, so far away? Millions of lights. And further away, millions and millions more. Don't you wish that your feathers could touch everywhere those lights spill? I feel that mine have. But no one wishes anymore to know of that.

In a sudden, aggressive gesture, Tesla draws the curtains over the window. He goes and sits wearily on the bed.

TESLA: (to the pigeon) Is it curious, that I should find it so unbearable sometimes, to contemplate the world I lit? Some nights, I am ravished by the sight of it. I feel that old wild brilliance in my breast. Elation and exhilaration. But not often. Most nights, I can only bear a single glance. (to the audience) Last week an old assistant came by to give me birthday wishes. He teaches now in a university. He had his textbooks with him and while he was exercising some fastidious muscle in his makeup, by— cleaning up my room, I looked into his textbooks. They are based, very much, on principles that I discovered in my youth. The rotating magnetic field. The polyphase transformer. The induction motor. (a beat) He saw me looking through his books. He asked, what was I looking for? Of course, not finding one mention of my name, I couldn't tell him what I was looking for.

Tesla wads his bedclothes to make a nest for the pigeon briefly, while he takes tissue from a box and sneezes, three times. He sniffs at the air.

TESLA: Dusty. (lifting the pigeon but speaking to the audience) In some of the histories of science, you may find a mention of me. It will say so little that the dates beside my name might have been filled up over fifty years ago. The twentieth century belongs to the likes of Marconi and Curie and De Forest. The ones who had the wits to use the ideas in my patents from another century. Or bigger names, like-- (coldly) Edison.

Tesla rises, crosses to the stool to speak from it. As he speaks, lights slowly dim over the stage and the spot comes up on Tesla on the stool.

TESLA: I once went to work for Mr. Edison. I was twenty-seven years old. I had just gotten off a boat. I had a letter in my pocket from Mr. Batchelor in Paris, introducing me to Edison.

But more than that, I had the blueprint of a new electrical science in my head. I had discovered that you can rotate magnetic fields and create electricity by eliminating drag and friction and brushes and sparks. I would replace all that with a magnetic whirlwind in space.

Lights dim and die over Tesla on his stool, rise on two tables centerstage, filled with electrical gadgetry, luminous lightbulbs, etc. A man whom we'll know as ASSISTANT works at one of the gadgets. Another man, EDISON, enters the stage to check on his progress. Edison is dressed as raggedly as a bowery bum, with a slovenly, stained shirt, vest and tilted bowler. He chews tobacco aggressively, spits wherever he can without hitting a table. He chews silently while looking over the shoulder of the assistant.

EDISON: Beautiful.

ASSISTANT: Isn't it?

Edison goes from scrutinizing a device, to scrutinizing the assistant.

EDISON: What am I paying you?

ASSISTANT: Eight dollars a week, Mr. Edison.

EDISON: Then get work and earn it. Yes?

Enter the young Tesla, in another suit, walking with European erectness and restraint.

TESLA: Mr. Edison? Your manager said I could find you here.
My name is Tesla. Nikola Tesla.

Tesla holds out his hand as if to shake hands. Edison chews, speculatively observing Tesla, spits.

TESLA: You don't use a spittoon in this country?

EDISON: Most do. (spits again) I find it hard to hit. The floor on the other hand is pretty damn difficult to miss.

Edison takes the letter Tesla offers, scans it.

EDISON: Know what my good crony Batchelor says in this? "I know two great men and you are one of them. The other is this young man." That a fact?

TESLA: No. Simply Mr. Batchelor's judgement.

EDISON: Mr. Batchelor's judgement once cost me a dinner bill for twenty at Delmonico's. You look almost as expensive. What can you do?

TESLA: (overlooking the tables) Those motors need fixing, I gather.

EDISON: You a betting man, Tesla?

Unseen by Edison -- seen by Tesla -- is the assistant's warning gesture, No.

TESLA: I try to refrain from that particular stimulus, sir.

EDISON: Whassat you say?

Edison cups his ear, then unpockets a n earhorn, uses it.

TESLA: I try to refrain from betting.

EDISON: Did some betting on a train? I'll tell you what.

Edison stacks motors beside one another like piles of gambling chips.

EDISON: I may be half deaf but I do know my favorite tune when I hear it. You get these humming it like a barbershop quartet and I'll hire you at seven dollars and two bits. You've got till... (consults pocket watch) ...two in the morning do?

TESLA: Fine. Is that seven dollars fifty cents a day?

The assistant, still unseen by Edison, shakes his head.

EDISON: S'right.

Edison's newest spit falls on Tesla's shoe. Tesla bends to rub it off with a handkerchief while the assistant watches Edison exit.

ASSISTANT: He'll pay you seven dollars fifty cents a week.

TESLA: (a laugh) But I have to live on that.

ASSISTANT: Then you volunteer for overtime. Where you from?

TESLA: Originally, Yugoslavia. I just came from Paris.

ASSISTANT: To work here?

TESLA: To work with the famed Edison. Yes.

ASSISTANT: (watching Tesla work) You're fast with those buggers. You got any fresh ideas for making them?

TESLA: Quite a few ideas.

ASSISTANT: Watch your mouth, then. Talk money good and loud, he's stone deaf. Whisper a good idea and he'll pinch it.

TESLA: Not this idea.

The lights darken over the stage until Tesla, at the motors, is barely a shadow. A soft hum rises from the stage. Grows louder. Lights come up over Tesla, alone, at the humming motors. Enter Edison.

EDISON: Only midnight. (taps two motors) They're both dragging.

TESLA: The armatures are worn to the bone. I wouldn't put those to work on anything important.

EDISON: See the machining shop tomorrow about that. Mind?

Edison pats Tesla at the ribs and waist.

EDISON: Just out of curiosity. Do you eat?

TESLA: Ravenously. I assure you.

EDISON: What?

TESLA: I'm partial to fish. Vegetables.

EDISON: No meat?

TESLA: Occasionally. Why?

EDISON: Ever eat human flesh, Tesla?

TESLA: (a long beat) Not to my knowledge. Have you?

EDISON: (slaps his belly) Skin and all. (picking up a sketch) What's this?

TESLA: I sketched that while I was waiting for you. It's a generator I'd like to build here. We could share the profits midway.

EDISON: Where's the commutator?

TESLA: No commutator, no brushes. It's all done with magnetic fields, sir. Like this.

Tesla uses a finger to illustrate the lines of force in the sketch.

EDISON: Even if that worked -- and I can tell you from the look of it, that it won't -- you'd be collecting here and here, different charges, still have to use a commutator.

TESLA: Mr. Edison. This isn't direct current. It's alternating current.

EDISON: (a violent spit of tobacco) Hogswallop. Tesla, I like you. Even if you are mostly bone and cockamamny nonsense. Let me tell you. In the last ninety days alone I have been visited by six people with proposals for alternating current. It's an infestation in the air these days. Like the Hong Kong flu.

TESLA: But it can do what direct current can't, it can travel -- potentially, over any distance.

EDISON: Direct current can travel.

TESLA: With booster stations every half mile?

EDISON: Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan and I intend to own every ~~last~~ last brick on every booster station. You know what kind of profits I'm looking at?

TESLA: A ton of coal a day for every booster station won't improve those profits, Mr. Edison.

EDISON: Morgan brings me the coal, I'll bring the world the electric lamp.

TESLA: You mean, the ones who can afford a nickel an hour for this.

Tesla gestures an electric light shining on the table.

TESLA: Sir. With alternating current generators in Niagra Falls, you could light the Eastern seaboard, every home, for dozens of those at a nickel a day.

EDISON: (looking at the diagram) Say this worked. I know it won't. Say it did. What would you want from it?

TESLA: Fifty per cent.

EDISON: No, no.

Edison points, in several directions.

EDISON: When the heat rises. What?

TESLA: A world with energy at everyone's fingertips. Anywhere. For next to nothing.

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Tesla takes a step back, surveying Tesla with acute attention; accents it with a spit of tobacco between Tesla's feet.

EDISON: Tesla, you give the world that, you know what you'll be giving them?

TESLA: A beginning.

EDISON: Everywhere those wires go, you'll be handing out a free drink. Hemlock, Tesla. With two shots of arsenic and a squirt of cyanide. Alternating current for the Eastern seaboard? Wonderful. If you want to murder half the inhabitants of the Eastern seaboard. It's not a system for delivering electricity. It's a weapon. Ever heard of electrocution?

TESLA: A mouse crossed two open wires at the plant in Paris. I know it.

EDISON: Horrible way to go.

TESLA: A kitchen knife is a horrible way to go, Mr. Edison. We use them every day.

EDISON: (a long beat) I don't. You have a job here. But I'll define it for you right now. It's maintenance on motors. Direct current motors. I don't want to hear any more impertinent blather about alternating current. Fair enough?

TESLA: Seven dollars and fifty cents a day, you said.

A beat. Then Edison reaches for his hearing aid.

EDISON: What was that?

TESLA: Access to all your laboratories, sir.

EDISON: Understood. Now for God's sake it's after midnight. Get on with your job, man.

Lights dim, darken over the center stage. Stageright, by the stool, a lightbulb snaps on. It is only bright enough to illuminate the face of Tesla. He holds it before his face with two hands. It is the older Tesla.

TESLA: The world remembers Mr. Edison. Still honors Mr. Edison. In large part, for this. When I first saw one of these, in Mr. Edison's lab, I wanted to learn where the energy went. How much into light. How much into heat and waste. About ninety per cent of those first bulbs went into waste. It's been about fifty years that Edison's General Electric Company has been making these. The heat waste in this brand-new bulb right now is still ninety per cent.

Lights rise over the hotel room stage.

TESLA: He wouldn't let me work on alternating current. I asked to work on a more efficient lamp.

EDISON: (o.s., laughter) For what, Tesla? You worried Morgan might run out of coal? Anyway, I already tried and she can't be done.

Tesla walks slowly to the bed, sits on it, stroking the pigeon.

TESLA: (to the pigeon) There, there, my pet. I know. It's still cold. (contains a sneeze) And the dust, from all that coal the Edison plant burns. (sorting feathers) It falls everywhere. It lies over your feathers. Your color isn't truly your own.

Tesla blows gently on the feathers of a wing.

TESLA: I cannot blow it off. Or clean it off. I'm sorry. We are both dressed in black today. (addressing the audience) I left the Edison laboratory not many months later. He had promised to pay me fifty thousand dollars for a job I did. (a long beat) I went to work as a day laborer. Two dollars a day, digging trenches for the lines that would carry

direct current, to a few fashionable homes in Manhattan.
(a beat) In time, I met some good men who financed my
first laboratory, at 33 South Fifth Avenue, only a three-
minute walk from Mr. Edison's laboratory.

The stage darkens and a soft whirring sound begins. The whirr is
accompanied by other whirring sounds. Over it, in the darkness, Tesla
speaks.

TESLA: (o.s.) For five years I had been carrying a rotating
magnetic field in my head. I adjusted pitches and voltages
and frequencies and watched my whirlwind spin. All inside
my head. In May of 1887, my invention took on a new
existence.

A bank of lightbulbs blinks to sudden light. In that light, we can see
a dynamo on a long table. Standing beside that table in a lab smock
is the assistant to Edison; now assistant to Tesla. We'll know him,
through this and coming scenes, as CZITO. The only lighting in this
scene is the light provided by the bank of bulbs. The younger Tesla,
also in a lab smock, throws a switch and a second bank of bulbs alights.

TESLA: Three-phase. Listen to it, Czito.

CZITO: It's so quiet. Almost eerie.

TESLA: (a laugh) You miss the racket, do you?

CZITO: No. I think I was going deaf like Edison from all that racket.

TESLA: Direct current is like firing a gun. Noisy. Alternating
current — do you know its secret, Czito? It's the same
secret of a violin string. Harmonics. We have found a
song that nature has been singing since the beginning of
the universe. But no one has heard it until now.

CZITO: Mr. Tesla. Last night I tried to explain your generator
to my brother-in-law. He studied as an engineer. But he's
become a missionary. When I said it was done strictly with
...fields, he said, be careful, Czito. That man Tesla is
playing with spiritual forces.

Tesla laughs with excited mirth.

TESLA: He said that? With a knowledge of electrical science, he said
that?

CZITO: Is it true?

TESLA: The day anyone learns what electricity is, we'll know, ^{won't we?} Now.
Could you adjust the tuning to a hundred thirty cycles?
Snap these off first. We're going to tune the violin.

The two banks of lights snap off, the hum of the generators rises in pitch.
A spotlight comes up on the elderly Tesla at the stool, holding the pigeon.

TESLA: Spiritual...forces.

He laughs again, a now-constrained, reflective, old man's laugh. He strokes the pigeon.

a man would hope

TESLA: Forgive me, my sweet. It has been a long lifetime and there are things the world might outgrow. But no. Only last week the reporter O'Neill told me, Tesla, I don't care what you say, you are psychic. Idiocy! A bigger waste of brainpower than Edison's bulb is a waste of electricity. The cosmos wheels and sparks with forces that in ignorance we call spiritual, and when we reinvent them, we call our own. When a wave of electricity ripples from my generator, is that spiritual? I cannot see it. I cannot touch it. But, my little pet, that wave is more physical than you or I. To learn the properties of that wave is to learn a world more substantial than these walls and floor. But you know, I cannot even say that to O'Neill. He would say I am talking like a spiritualist. He can't imagine that the secrets of energy are more physical than anything they give rise to. Or that the universe pulses to a beat our stunted ears don't hear. Mmm, my little one, like this beat. (pause; then to the audience) Perhaps there are times, though, when people are prepared to listen for those pulses. Certain people, at least. Like Mr. George Westinghouse.

The spotlight goes dark on Tesla, rises on a well-dressed man centerstage, crouching at the humming generator. He whistles, rises, studies the generator from another angle. He touches it in several places, then moves in to peer through an opening. The spotlight spreads to include the young Tesla and Czito to the side. Westinghouse is short, stout, bearded.

WESTINGHOUSE: I have a staff of damned well-paid engineers who'd tell me I was being hornswaggled by this, Tesla. How many cycles is this doing right now?

TESLA: Sixty.

WESTING: Sixty cycles sounds awfully low. We use a hundred thirty-three cycles in our Pittsburgh plant.

TESLA: I know.

WESTING: Have you tried a hundred thirty-three cycles?

TESLA: Yes. I've studied dozens of frequencies. The copper wire you'd need at most of them to wire the northeast to Niagra Falls would empty our known copper mines, sir.

WESTING: (standing back; impressed) Niagra. You know, J.P. Morgan's fortune is on a betting table right now. And the bet's against Niagra.

TESLA: Mr. Morgan is dead wrong.

WESTING: (laughs) I happen to agree with you. But I can't match his bet. I doubt if anyone can.

TESLA: (touching the humming machine) This can.

WESTING: (peering again into the generator) All done with whirling dervishes, fantastic. Tesla, I'm not a man to be amazed by things. But frankly, this is so out of the blue sky that if I didn't see it here and now, I could live a hundred years, I don't think I'd see it then. A million dollars. Okay?

TESLA: (a beat) And royalties, I assume.

WESTING: Royalties? On all the power generated by Niagra Falls. How much?

TESLA: Two fifty per horsepower, if that sounds fair.

Westinghouse takes a checkbook from his pocket and the lights darken over the center stage. A spotlight comes up on the stool. Enter the older Tesla, holding the pigeon.

TESLA: Two cents per horsepower would have been fair. Ten dollars per horsepower would have been fair. I am not a man of finance. Clearly enough. Westinghouse was a good man. A man of vision. And an honest man. Every promise that man made to me, he kept. But his company was small. And even if the harnessing of Niagra would make it a giant, two dollars and fifty cents per horsepower would break it, before it got there.

Tesla rises from his stool. The spotlight follows him to the center of the stage. The table and generator are gone.

TESLA: I will show you something.

Tesla goes to the window and pulls away the curtain. The Manhattan skyline at night.

TESLA: Two dollars and fifty cents per horsepower. Two cents per horsepower. I would be as wealthy a man as this world knows.

Slowly, Tesla draws the curtain again. Lights come up over the shabby room. Tesla takes the armchair.

TESLA: He came to me. Sent by his investors. He asked me what he said he had no business asking me. It tormented him to ask me. He asked me to dissolve the royalty contract.

There is a rapping at the hotel door.

TESLA: What is it?

WOMAN: (o.s.) Mr. Tesla?

TESLA: What is it?

WOMAN: (o.s.) The manager sent me, Mr. Tesla. Please open up. Otherwise I have the hotel key.

Tesla rises, becomes aware of the pigeon he holds. He goes to the window box and lifts the towels to set the pigeon inside.

TESLA: I am sorry, my pet. It will only be for a few minutes. I assure you.

Tesla replaces the towels, then takes the armchair, sitting formally erect.

TESLA: Then you may use your key.

The hotel door opens. A young woman dressed in a hotel uniform blazer enters. She surveys the room at a glance and stiffens. The sight nauseates her. With resolve, she closes the door behind her, approaches Tesla. Tesla rises with formal decorum from his chair, also with conspicuous effort.

TESLA: Yes?

The woman's efforts to speak are a form of constrained gagging. The filth of the room, the smell of pigeons, and the chill stale air appall her.

WOMAN: My name is Francis Cambell. I'm the new assistant manager.

TESLA: (sitting again) Yes?

WOMAN: (gesturing the window) Those are pigeons you keep. Is that correct?

TESLA: I don't keep them. They come to me of their free will.

WOMAN: Mr. Tesla, I don't know who made the complaint. Whether it was one of our guests, or one of your visitors, I don't know.

TESLA: I have very few visitors, Miss Campbell.

WOMAN: The complaint was made to the municipal health department. They called us. They've asked to come and see this room.

TESLA: They have no business here. You told them that, I'm certain.

Overcoming her trepidation, the woman goes to the towels draped over the birdcage below the window. She touches a towel. Tesla rises in a shot.

TESLA: Please. I'll have to ask you not to touch that.

WOMAN: (to herself, a sickened breath) Oh my God.

The woman steps away from the birdcage. Flutterings and cooings from within. She looks over the room. Holds her stomach.

WOMAN: I'm afraid we only have two choices, Mr. Tesla. One is to bring in maids and thoroughly clean this room before the health inspectors arrive tomorrow morning.

TESLA: You have the choice of telling the health inspectors that this is your hotel. (constrained) Dammit.

WOMAN: We have two maids on staff tonight. Will you help us, Mr. Tesla?

TESLA: My birds.

WOMAN: (a long beat) There can be no birds in this room tomorrow.

TESLA: Give me another room for my birds.

WOMAN: I asked if you would help us.

TESLA: (a beat) I'll take it under consideration. Why don't you give me a couple hours.

WOMAN: Mr. Tesla. The inspectors will be here, without fail, at nine o'clock tomorrow morning. The maids are available now. But it's evening. I can't ask them to wait two hours.

TESLA: (a beat) One hour?

WOMAN: You can't decide now?

TESLA: I need to confer about such a decision.

WOMAN: You asked that your telephone be taken out. Do you wish it replaced?

TESLA: Telephone? No. I want no telephone.

WOMAN: You said you wanted to confer...I'm sorry. (a beat) Mr. Sampson, the manager, said to send his regards. He asked me to ask you, how long since you've eaten.

TESLA: I don't recall.

WOMAN: While the room is being cleaned, he'd like you to have a dinner on the house. Here.

She hands Tesla a menu.

TESLA: (touched) That's very kind of him. I appreciate it.

WOMAN: No matter what you decide, I think the dinner stands.

TESLA: Could I ask-- one other favor?

WOMAN: Yes?

TESLA: Downstairs, just around the corner. I should think they'd still be open. The pet store. They know my order. It's a special blend of rape, hemp and canary seed.

Tesla bends to locate a paper bag, much abused.

TESLA: Here. Sometimes they are out of sacks.

The woman stands in silent paralysis.

TESLA: Would you? Please?

The woman takes the bag.

WOMAN: I'll be back in an hour, Mr. Tesla.

She exits. Tesla rises and goes to the construction beneath the window, opening it to withdraw his pigeon.

TESLA: Hello, my love. Are you chilled? Was the air in here so numbingly cold? Here. Here. I will warm you. Stay with me. Don't ever leave me. And I will never leave you.

Tesla huddled hands, breast, around the pigeon. He goes back to sit on the armchair.

TESLA: She will be bringing you food. I know. It has been so long. Too long. But soon you will eat. Soon we will both eat. Isn't that good news? Yes? (a beat) She brought bad news as well. Tomorrow we must leave this hotel. We must find another hotel. I am getting old for this. Packing my things. Finding someone to watch you and take care of you while I look for a room where we can both live, no different from the way we live here. Perhaps I should ask to see the manager, Mr. Sampson. Mmm? What do you think, my sweet? Perhaps I should tell him to stand up to the city of New York and its ridiculous health department that would go barging in on people's rooms with no right. Just those silly shiny badges on their vests. Mr. Sampson can be a hard man. I think he may be a good man, too. What do you think, my love? Should I demand to speak to him?

Tesla bends over his pigeon with a kiss. Settles back. Hums a lullabye.

TESLA: Yes. Yes. I will demand to speak with Mr. Sampson. But only after you have eaten, dear one. Only after ... hmmm, both of us have eaten.

The set goes dark. There are sounds of loud, electrical crackling. The crackling becomes visible. Midstage, slightly upstage, what appears to be a man seated in a chair is tossed and jiggled; sparks snap and

crackle with the sound. Slowly, a spotlight comes dimly over the device: an electric chair, containing a dummy. Edison, hands in pockets, stands beside it with an associate.

TESLA: (o.s., in older voice) I gave Westinghouse my birthright. But it helped him fight a war. The war for alternating current. Mr. Edison fought by creating the first public display that the world would associate with alternating current. He built a chair, wired for oscillating frequencies. The man who'd once claimed to eat human flesh, skin and all, devised the first means of frying it, with my machinery.

The lights are full up on Edison and his assistant. The dummy convulses.

EDISON: I like those Westinghouse machines. Oughta buy some more.

The associate laughs.

EDISON: You can kill it. Hell. Looks like we already have.

The associate presses a large breaker. The chair goes quiet. Both the associate and Edison step forward to remove the straps from the dummy.

ASSOC: Look at those burn marks, Mr. Edison.

EDISON: What do you think it'll take? A minute?

ASSOC: On the cats we been doing tests, it's the rare one, goes more than half a minute.

EDISON: The dogs?

ASSOC: Some, over a minute.

EDISON: We need to know how long it takes a man to be Westinghoused. How about, you running this up to Sing Sing? Make it a gift. Then we'll build another one for the road.

ASSOC: A kind of travelling vaudeville act. Yeah. Yeah.

EDISON: Build it so you can do hogs, calves, anything of a size halfway to being a man.

ASSOC: (as a barker) Come see it, folks. Here's what it looks like to get...Westinghoused.

EDISON: (spits tobacco) Horrible way to go.

The lights die over Edison, associate, and the electric chair. A spot rises slowly on Tesla, in the armchair.

TESLA: A most horrible way to go. On the sixth of August, 1890, a man sentenced to death was strapped into that chair. His name was William Kemmler. Edison's people were there. They'd done it all. Installed the chair. Ran the circuits.

Everything, I'm told, but pull the switch. Mr. Kemmler proved a disappointment to Mr. Edison. He did not submit to being Westinghoused. He went through gruesome convulsions. When they pulled the straps off, his skin was black as pitch. Reporters in the gallery could smell the char of Kemmler's flesh. But he was breathing. And they had to strap him up and do it all a second time.

Tesla goes to the stool, followed by the spotlight. A separate spot rises on the electric chair, still present.

TESLA: There would be later demonstrations of my discovery. When city after city filled with light. But the first that the public ever saw of my invention was Mr. Edison's electric chair. And I have many times contemplated: what manner of invention is it?

The spotlight brightens on the electric chair, dims on Tesla.

TESLA: Its workings are simple, yet inconceivable. Beautifully tuned harmonics of electrical frequencies are struck to their most exquisite pitch, to be guided into those conductive straps. It's as if rivers of dazzling energy were guided to meet — a dam it is in their wild nature to burst. But what is that dam? Not a thing of concrete and mortar. A human being, itself more electrical than we know. The body oscillates at about two billion volts of potential. It is tuned with a fine-wrought sensitivity to the frequency of the planet itself. Its brain is a conductive agent in which every smell and sight and thought is the negotiation of ultra-sensitive electrical harmonics. Its nerve fibers are a more complex electrical conduit than all the wiring in the city of Paris. The human being is nature's discovery of the meaning of electricity. It is electricity tuned to a finer pitch than our ears can hear, our eyes can see. And in this— obscenity—

Tesla crosses the stage, entering the bright spotlight over the electric chair.

TESLA: The two most awesome mysteries of nature meet. Man and electricity. Sharers of the grandest destiny imaginable. But they don't meet to share it. They meet to deny and contradict it.

Tesla knocks the electric chair to its side.

TESLA: It cannot be an invention. Else I cannot be an inventor.

The light dims over Tesla as he walks to the bed, sits, cradling the pigeon.

TESLA: My love, forgive me. How I talk on and on. Soon. Soon she will bring you your dinner. Then I will talk to Mr. Sampson. Mmmm? (kisses the pigeon's beak) And perhaps he will let us stay.

The room darkens. O.S., but from more than one speaker -- the effect should be of a pervasive source -- a thunderous roar rises. The roar of Niagara. The spotlight shoots down upon a podium, center stage. It is bedecked in ribbons. The roar diminishes that we can hear the elder Tesla, over.

TESLA: (o.s.) April, 1895. Niagara Falls. Fifteen thousand horsepower of electricity is being delivered to Buffalo, New York, using alternating current.

The roar of the falls elides into another, larger roar: applause, as the younger Tesla takes the podium. The applause goes quiet.

TESLA: Ladies. Gentlemen. Honorable members of the Niagara Falls Commission. I am proud to be a part of this momentous event. (looking up) Those transmission cables stretch from these great falls twenty-six miles, where they power the lights and streetcars of Buffalo. I have an announcement. Presently, in my laboratory, I am working on another method for transmitting electrical energy. Without wires.

Muttering begins to grow in the crowd, o.s.

TESLA: This new method will enable enormous voltages to pass safely through this earth itself, for distances even greater than twenty-six miles. I am also working on a method for transmitting electricity through the atmosphere. One offshoot I have discovered, is a means of illuminating enormous reaches of the very sky, at nights. Our oceans can be safer for transport. Our city streets can be lit at night without expensive streetlamps.

The muttering disappears, replaced by a hush, and small sounds of awe.

TESLA: Another offshoot is a means of controlling the forces that govern the weather itself. But I have said enough. I applaud the Niagara Falls Commission and Mr. George Westinghouse, for this historical achievement.

Applause as Tesla steps briskly from the podium. The light spreads to include several newspapermen rushing to Tesla, and one man who doesn't rush, but whom Tesla recognizes, and to whom Tesla rushes. The man is the British scientist LORD RAYLEIGH. Tesla shakes his hand; the newspapermen break away to let the two men talk.

TESLA: Lord Rayleigh. Welcome to the birthplace of A.C.

RAYLEIGH: (laughing) Birthplace, Tesla? Sounded like you were talking over its grave.

TESLA: (excitedly) I have it. Most of it. I've already sent streamers a hundred feet, Lord Rayleigh. And this... (stomps) The crust of the earth. I'm just beginning to learn its own electric resonance. Imagine! Tapping into that resonance.

We could send power into the deserts, from right here, Niagara Falls. Or even intelligence. Imagine. With a tiny wrist radio like this. Picking up Hertzian waves, out of the ground.

RAYLEIGH: You're working with Hertzian waves now, too? Tesla.

Rayleigh puts an arm over Tesla's shoulder, strolls with him the distance of the podium as he speaks.

RAYLEIGH: Could I give you one word of advice? Specialize.

TESLA: (a laugh) Specialize? My researches carry me in such new directions--

RAYLEIGH: Tesla, you may be fifty years ahead of most of the rest of us in some of those researches. All the more reason. The electrical sciences are changing. Maybe not for the better. But they only respect thorough work. You can't just find the mineral deposits these days. You have to mine them.

TESLA: I'll make the money. I'll hire the people who can. Lord Rayleigh. If you'd just come visit my laboratory, I can show you wonders like you've never seen.

RAYLEIGH: You don't think I came to this country just for this, do you?

Lights die over Tesla and Rayleigh. The stage is completely dark. The young Tesla in voiceover. As he speaks strange lighting effects take place on the stage. CZITO, dressed in black, crosses the stage with a glowing purplish bulb. As he reaches a certain point, he turns the bulb. The colors in the bulb change. To yellow. To green. To blue. All by maneuvering the angle of the bulb. He completes the trip across the stage.

TESLA: (o.s.) This is a gas-filled tube. The glass is uranium glass. There are no conductive wires. You'll notice, when Czito enters the area from which the field waves are produced, he can alter the color in the lamp

VOICE: (o.s.) What do you call that, Tesla?

TESLA: (a laugh) I'm sorry, Mr. Twain. It's just a laboratory curiosity. I haven't named it. Here. I'll show you one I have named. Czito.

Tesla steps into the lit area, withdrawing two long tubes. They look like present-day fluorescent tubes. Except for a sword-like protrusion at the bottle, heft and handle. Tesla hands them to Czito, then holds up two wires, stripped at the ends.

TESLA: This, gentlemen, is live voltage. About a hundred thousand volts at frequencies high enough to be safe to living tissue. Now watch carefully.

Tesla takes from Czito a thick stretch of adhesive tape and tapes the open lines of voltage to his wrist.

TESLA: The sensation is a peculiar furry buzz, throughout my limbs, strongest at my spinal cord. Quite pleasant, really. Czito. But first extinguish that other bulb.

The stage goes totally dark. Then a brilliant shaft of light appears; and a second. A whoosh of astonishment from the small group, now visible in that powerful light. Tesla steps back, brandishing the two long bulbs as if they were lifted swords. The whole stage is lit by them.

TESLA: You may find it incongruous. I do. No lamp from the Edison laboratories has yet provided the brilliance of these lamps. I call them flaming swords.

TWAIN: (o.s.) By God, Tesla, you'd scare the enemy out of their britches with those things.

Laughter.

TESLA: (waving the swords, walking) They are vacuum tubes with a condensed gas that's activated by high-frequency waves. Czito. Can we show our guests what happens when we alter the frequencies? First, at higher frequencies.

Czito moves to the controls. Tesla stands still, holding the two swordlike lamps straight up. The glow brightens, becoming almost unbearable to look at.

TESLA: Now, at lower frequencies.

The glow in the bulbs rapidly softens. They take on a gentle yellow color. Then greenish to purplish glows. Eventually they are faint traces of light, like stripes of day-glo in a darkened room.

TESLA: You see. These flaming swords can burn like the sun or wane like a candle. All depending on the number of cycles per second. Czito. The lights, please. One more demonstration, gentlemen. I call it my...button lamp.

Lights go on over center stage. Czito turns off the voltage; Tesla unstraps his wrist. He withdraws a small glass globe and sets it on the table.

TESLA: With this, I am about to vaporize this diamond. Mr. Twain. Would you please examine my diamond?

Twain steps forward: a well-dressed, slightly hefty figure with the classic mustache. He scoops the diamond into his palm, squints into light through it.

TWAIN: Bitch of a thing to do to it, Tesla. I'd guess ten carots. Lord Rayleigh?

Lord Rayleigh examines the diamond.

RAYLEIGH: Twelve, possibly.

Rayleigh hands the diamond to Tesla. Tesla unscrews, then lifts the glass tube as if it were an inverted goldfish bowl.

TESLA: The diamond is our button. I place it here, on this single wire. I screw back the lamp. And Czito will pump out the air and pump in the gas.

Tesla steps back to let Czito take over.

TESLA: What happens is very simple. Yet I never cease to find it awesome. The high frequency that surges into the button electrostatically awakens the molecules of gas inside the globe. They're shot at the glass. They bounce back, at the bottom. In an instant, hundreds of billions of molecules at a superheated state will attack that button. And vaporize it. Czito. Are we ready? The lights please. Gentlemen, I must warn you. The heat from this lamp can be felt many feet away.

The guests move slightly back.

TESLA: Thank you. I am running the current...now.

The glass bulb lights up. Takes on a glow like a powerful lamp. Then a brighter, ferocious glow. It reaches an almost unbearable intensity, then rapidly dims and dies. The lights come up over the exhibit.

TESLA: Gentlemen. Whoever can find the diamond keeps it.

There is no rush to the table. The guests stand a moment in amazement, then slowly move forward. One touches the lamp, jerks his finger back.

TESLA: (a small laugh) Yes. Still quite hot, I'm afraid.

TWAIN: (up close, marvelling) Like it was never there. Confounding.

RAYLEIGH: Tesla, whatever this is, it is not a lamp. My God, the implications. I'm not even sure you're dealing with electrical science, so much as...atoms.

TESLA: Perhaps the best means of learning about atoms, is through electricity.

RAYLEIGH: I would never have thought so. Until I saw that.

The stage darkens abruptly. A spotlight rises over the stool. The elder Tesla takes it, holding the pigeon.

TESLA: ' Regrettably, I didn't patent any of those -- laboratory
' curiosities. I was so busy following where they led me,
' I never considered they might have important applications.
' (a beat) But just last year, somebody did take out a

patent for a tube lamp identical to mine. Called, fluorescent, I believe. And last year a physics teacher at Cambridge wrote, asking details on my button lamp. Only, he wrote to my assistant, Czito. He took it for granted, after all the silence... that I was dead.

Dim lights come up over the room. Tesla rises from the stool, goes to the armchair, sinks into it, holding the pigeon just before his face.

TESLA: Perhaps, in every measure the world knows, I am dead. Except to you. Hey, my pet? You don't find these hands cold. Do you? This tongue stilled. Do you? Ooooh, I know. You're hungry. But she's coming, she's coming. (to the audience; a small laugh) There was a young newspaper reporter who found me in the park last summer. He asked if the obscurity and poverty -- the open grave into which my greatest ideas have been interred -- was that my fault, or the world's fault. (another laugh) I'm afraid I wasn't helpful. I said, young man, we are meat machines, you and I. We are governed by the slightest disturbances in the fluctuating ether. A sunspot flashes ninety-three million miles in the sky. But its resonance touches the corona of the eye, a nodal sensitivity in the brain, and like that-- (snapping fingers) -- you catch a cold, desert a friend, or fall in love. What sunspots have governed my long subjection to this...? (looking round; then a long pause; then, tightly) I know them. a beat) Though, I thank the heavens, there was a time when I didn't.

Lights darken over the stage, and a swelling band starts up. A small restaurant band, heavy with violins, playing a tune from the 1890's. Candles come alight on a table. A waiter bends to light them. Tinkling glasses, tinkling laughter. Lights rise on the table of two. One is an elegant young Tesla, the other a trim and suave young man we'll know as JOHNSON, Tesla's friend, an editor of the Century magazine, and a poet. Beside Tesla's plate is a small stack of napkins. He only uses a napkin to discard it. Otherwise, the patterns are normal. He eats his salad heartily, energetically drinks the wine. We are at Delmonico's, height of New York social life at the peak of the crystalline 1890's.

JOHNSON: (mid-story, with laughter) Did I know that inventor, Nikola Tesla? (an eruptive laugh) I've-- met him, I said. Been to his laboratory, on occasion...

TESLA: With a straight face, Robert?

JOHNSON: Yes! Katherine couldn't. She made as if she were having indigestion. I tell you, Tesla, when the ambassador of Italy is more interested in--

Enter Katherine, Johnson's wife. A beautiful young woman in a very elegant gown. Both Johnson and Tesla rise.

KATHER: I'm sorry darling. (kisses Johnson) Mr. Tesla. Two weeks, but it seems like an eternity.

TESLA: Katherine.

She offers her face to Tesla, conspicuously for a kiss. Tesla smiles. It's a tense smile; nods politely. Katherine covers her reaction with a brilliant smile.

KATHER: You look splendid. All those brilliant lights in your laboratory, I do believe you have a bit of tan.

They all sit. Katherine immediately bending slightly into the table, achieving an instantly conspiratorial tone.

KATH: I wouldn't look now, Mr. Tesla, but two tables behind you is Margaret DeWitt.

TESLA: Should I know that name? I'm afraid--

Johnson laughs with rollicking delight.

KATH: Two weeks ago the New York Herald Tribune quoted her as saying that New York's most unavailable but attractive bachelor happens to be keen on someone. You remember all the reporters--

TESLA: It's nonsense. She must have made it up.

JOHNSON: I...think, she was angling to meet you, Nik.

TESLA: With phony gossip? I'd find such a woman insufferable.

KATH: Perhaps, she doesn't think it's phony.

TESLA: Then I can't for the life of me imagine whom she'd have in mind.

Tesla swivels his head to observe the woman of whom they are speaking. He turns back.

TESLA: All is explained. (darkly) A redhead.

JOHNSON: (more wild laughter) Margaret DeWitt is someone to reckon with, but explain--? How?

TESLA: (tapping his crown of hair with a finger) The light that enters, here. I haven't completed my proof, yet. But I will. Certain colors alter the vibratory resonance. The light that massages all of us, massages redheads in another way. Part of the spectrum is gone from their thinking.

Tesla attacks his salad. Johnson laughs, but fondly; without derision. Katherine's curiosity is piqued.

KATH: How can light affect us, though, except through the eyes?

TESLA: When medical science learns the final secrets of health, they'll be discussing matters of light. Mark my words. These fingertips -- (gesturing) -- are probably as sensitive

to color as the cones and rods of the eye. Science still can't register the sensitive scale with which they register. Someday it will.

Enter two men, Edison and a portly, very well-dressed gentleman, J.P. MORGAN. Edison is dressed, for once, quite well; including spats. He sees Tesla, and tries to guide his companion away. But Morgan recognizes Tesla.

MORGAN: (to Edison) Isn't that the inventor Tesla?

EDISON: I'm told he's better at poetry than invention, Mr. Morgan.

MORGAN: Introduce me, Edison.

EDISON: (flustered) As you wish.


Edison and Morgan approach the table. Edison's hostility to Tesla is equalled by Tesla's animosity to Edison.

EDISON: Mr. Johnson. Mrs. Johnson. Tesla.

TESLA: Good evening, Edison.

Tesla recognizes Morgan; he and Johnson rise.

EDISON: Mr. Pierpont Morgan, Tesla.

MORGAN: The Niagara installation is a stunning thing to see. I commend you. 

TESLA: Thank you, sir.

MORGAN: My eyes and ears -- oh, not these old things -- tell me you are at work on transmitting signals through space. No wires.

TESLA: I am, sir. I'm using Hertzian waves.

EDISON: I've tried, Mr. Morgan. She can't be done. 

TESLA: With what frequency oscillators have you tried, Edison?

EDISON: I've used Crookes' oscillators.

TESLA: These days, Crookes is using mine. Mr. Morgan, if you'd care to come by my laboratory, I'd be delighted to demonstrate some early applications.

MORGAN: I'll be abroad the next month but why don't you send me a reminder after that?

Morgan gives Tesla a card.

MORGAN: They call it, radio, isn't that the name?

TESLA: Nosir. Merely one application. I'll show you others.

MORGAN: I'll be delighted. Mr. Tesla. Mr. Johnson. Mrs. Johnson.

Morgan and Edison exit. Tesla and Johnson take their seats. Johnson laughs wildly; Katherine joins; Tesla smiles.

JOHNSON: (a better-than-fair Tesla imitation) These days, Crookes is using mine.

KATH: His collar. Right here. (indicates) Red as a fire wagon.

JOHNSON: Nik. Can I see that card? (reads) House of Morgan. No address. Just, New York. I can't tell if that's grandly contemptuous, or merely arrogant.

KATH: It's money. Mr. Tesla, you must feel honored.

TESLA: Morgan is a man to know. But the strings to his money are tied with hooks.

JOHNSON: Nik, give him one moneymaker -- my God you churn out ideas for three before breakfast -- and you can start slapping new patents on each of those hooks. Your patents.

TESLA: Possibly.

Katherine cannot understand Tesla's constraint. In her exuberance, she touches his hand.

KATH: Mr. Tesla, I think you are as tickled as we are. True?

Tesla frees his hand to reach for another napkin from the pile. He smiles his most practiced European smile.

TESLA: Mrs. Johnson--

KATH: Come off that now. It's Katherine.

TESLA: (a beat) Seeing that man Edison has upset my appetite, I'm afraid. Would it be ungracious of me to ask--

JOHNSON: Yes it would, Nik. And bloody insolent to boot. (gesturing) Waiter, more wine. And a carafe of cognac. By God man I'm going to teach you something about celebration; yet.

TESLA: Robert. My fondness for cognac notwithstanding--

JOHNSON: The divine ambrosia, to quote a poet I know.

TESLA: I do have to work tonight.

JOHNSON: You, my dear man, have to learn that the interest of a man like J.P. Morgan is worth a year -- all right, in your case, a month -- of work. And accordingly, you will take the night off.

TESLA: My assistants will be waiting.

JOHNSON: We'll send them a telegram. (gestures) PROCEED ACCORDINGLY.
No. Needs a touch. (gestures again) PROCEED ACCORDINGLY.
PROCEEDS POUNDING ON THE DOOR.

TESLA: (a laugh) Robert. We may both be due for a hanging.

KATH: Can't that be three of us, due for a hanging?

TESLA: Do they hang women in New York state, Robert? (an ill-timed
laugh) I'm sorry, Mrs. Johnson. Penal law forbids it.

Johnson sputters a laugh. Tesla joins him. Katherine slumps back,
visibly wounded. Lights darken abruptly over the set; the candles are
blown out. There is a knocking at the door.

WOMAN: (o.s., over darkness) Mr. Tesla. It's the assistant
manager. Miss Campbell.

Lights come slowly up over Tesla, in his armchair, holding the pigeon.
He sits more erectly. He's heard the noise, not made the association.
The knocks again.

WOMAN: Mr. Tesla. Do you wish that I use my key again?

TESLA: If you don't mind. Please.

Tesla stands, awaiting her. She enters carrying a tray with plates covered
by silver warmers.

WOMAN: I went ahead and ordered you the evening's specialty,
Mr. Tesla. I hope you find it to your liking.

She sets the tray on a table or bureau. Folds her hands, awaiting
the news. Sees the pigeon in Tesla's hands.

WOMAN: You've decided to allow the maids in, I hope.

TESLA: The maids?

WOMAN: They're waiting outside, with a vacuum and spongemops.

TESLA: (sitting again) I'm sorry. My mind wandered. (abruptly)
The seed mix. Rape and hemp and canary seed from the pet
store. (a pause) I've promised my little friend a dinner,
too.

WOMAN: (a difficult long pause) Mr. Tesla. This is 1939.

TESLA: Of course. Yes.

WOMAN: I never knew that pet store. The bell captain remembers
it. They went out of business in 1934.

TESLA: (a long pause) My assistant, Czito, fetches it from there all the time. (at her silence) You had best return that tray to the kitchen. Perhaps they can give it to someone else. I really couldn't eat while my friend doesn't eat. You understand.

WOMAN: Mr. Tesla. Please may I allow the maids in?

TESLA: (a beat) I wish to speak with Mr. Sampson.

WOMAN: An hour ago that would have been possible. He's gone home.

TESLA: Then fetch him.

WOMAN: To his home in Yonkers.

TESLA: Then call his home in Yonkers.

WOMAN: Mr. Sampson has given me full authority to handle this matter as I see fit. I've given you an hour, Mr. Tesla. (a pause; at his silence) I could call the bell captain. I could ask that he help you pack your bags. I will. If you don't allow the maids in. Now. May I tell them to come in?

Tesla looks around the room, as if dislocated. Looks to the window.

TESLA: But the pigeons.

WOMAN: According to the bell captain, pigeons of yours have been removed to the warm eaves outside the kitchen, on other occasions.

TESLA: They were well. This one...my pet...this one is not well.

WOMAN: Mr. Tesla. I will be perfectly frank. I will not leave this room until every pigeon and every evidence of pigeons has been taken from this room. Is that clear?

In emphasis, she takes a chair. Tesla rises, even more disoriented.

TESLA: I live here.

WOMAN: You rent a room from this hotel. Your rent is two months in arrears. It so happens we have the assurance it will be paid from your annuity fund. Backrent is not the issue.

TESLA: The Yugoslavian government awarded me that annuity. Young woman. Do you know who I am? Do you know who you're talking to?

Tesla goes to the draped window and pulls the drapes dramatically.

TESLA: Can you count the lights out there? Can you count the hours, or the places, when all your life, you've been dependent on those lights -- or on the stoves, and iceboxes and trolleys and movie shows and God have you... Even your hair. The last

time you went to the beauty parlor, it was blow-dried, wasn't it? (with emphasis) Wasn't it?

WOMAN: Mr. Tesla. I must advise against your agitating yourself like this.

TESLA: That blowdryer operates on the energy provided by an electrical circuit of alternating current that fluctuates at sixty cycles per second. With any other circuit, anywhere in the world, it's useless. (a beat) I gave you the power in that hairdryer, Miss Campbell. (a beat) I gave it to the world.

Tesla goes to the window, staring out. Miss Campbell rises.

WOMAN: I'm sure you did.

TESLA: Say anything you like, young woman, but do not patronize me.

Tesla stalks to the bed, sits, clutching his pigeon, glaring at Miss Campbell.

TESLA: Now. If you will please go.

CAMPBELL: I apologize.

TESLA: (glaring, forceful) Go.

CAMPBELL: I'm sorry. I am not leaving until this room can pass the sanitation requirements of the municipal health department.

TESLA: Do not tempt me to contemplate legal action, Miss Campbell.

CAMPBELL: Sir. I will say something I had hoped I wouldn't have to say. Only because of Mr. Sampson is there any question of allowing you to stay at all.

TESLA: And what does that mean?

CAMPBELL: Frankly. It means my patience is quite limited right now. I am going to the hallway. I am calling in the maids. They will dispose of the debris and your birdcage and any birds that happen to be in that cage.

TESLA: (clutching his pigeon) Not of my pet, they will not.

CAMPBELL: You and I can work on that problem. If there is any protest, now or when the maids appear, I will be leaving, and returning with the bell captain and your eviction service, in writing.

Campbell rises and goes to the door. She has just opened it when Tesla calls.

TESLA: Wait.

CAMPBELL: Yes.

TESLA: The dinner you brought. Is there any bread with it? A roll? Something that might crumble? (a beat) For my friend.

Campbell crosses to the tray in quick strides, lifts the lid on the dinner, plucks up a roll. She places it on the napkin, carries it to Tesla.

TESLA: Thank you. (a smile) She thanks you too.

CAMPBELL: (almost against her better self) It's a she?

TESLA: Oh yes.

CAMPBELL: I thought you couldn't tell.

TESLA: I can.

CAMPBELL: I'll ask the maids...to be as quiet as they can. (a beat) While your...friend is eating.

Miss Campbell goes to the door. Tesla crumbles the roll into the cupped napkin and bends over the pigeon to encourage it to eat.

Lights darken over the stage.

End of Act One.

Act Two

The curtain rises on the hotel room. The bed is made, all the litter gone from the floor. The pigeon cage is gone from beneath the window. The curtains are open to the lights of New York.

Tesla sits in the armchair, hands cupped under his beloved pigeon. Off to a side of the room stands Miss Campbell, arms folded, a toe tapping the floor.

CAMPBELL: We will neither of us sleep tonight at this rate, Mr. Tesla.

TESLA: I sleep very little. But I prefer the lights off. The window curtained. So my pet can sleep.

CAMPBELL: Your pet has a place to sleep. A warm nest inside a warm cage beside the furnace room in the basement. It is a room to which you will have a key. You can visit your bird anytime you like.

A streak of impatience snaps in Miss Campbell. She walks toward Tesla. He draws the pigeon to his breast protectively.

CAMPBELL: Come on. We'll go down together. You can assure yourself that your bird will be fine.

TESLA: She will die in a cage.

CAMPBELL: Mr. Tesla, I am not talking about an alternative. I am talking about the lengths that I am willing to go, so that you needn't move from this hotel.

TESLA: (a beat) Look. Her eyes. See how smoky they are?

Campbell wheels from Tesla and his pigeon.

CAMPBELL: Then come tomorrow morning, if you wish to call a vet in, call a vet in. MiGod. Send me the bill. Okay?

TESLA: That's generous of you.

CAMPBELL: It's totally mad of me but I want to go home and go to bed. Now, can we move your precious pet downstairs?

TESLA: But she will die in a cage.

Campbell slaps an open hand to her forehead. It's as though the same conversation has been making the same circles for awhile.

CAMPBELL: And she may just die, cage or no cage, without the attention of a veterenarian. (sharply) Mr. Tesla.

TESLA: You don't understand. I have never loved anyone as I love this pigeon.

CAMPBELL: Anyone. (a beat) Forgive me, Mr. Tesla, if I have my difficulties, believing that.

TESLA: But why? She could tell you. She knows. A separation would kill her. And it would leave me, alone, in a way I've never been alone.

CAMPBELL: (delicately) Mr. Tesla, could I ask you a personal question? Somewhere in your life -- you said you're 84 -- somewhere in those 84 years, hasn't there been a woman?

Tesla slowly lifts his head, seems to fade into his memories.

CAMPBELL: Surely one.

TESLA: No.

CAMPBELL: As I said. I have my difficulties, believing that.

TESLA: My only love has been invention. For an inventor to share his soul with a woman-- Artists can. Writers can. They can draw from that embrace. But an inventor can only embrace the energy of things unknown. To share with a woman, would hamper him. No. It's true.

CAMPBELL: (taking a seat near his) But you must have felt-- if this isn't too personal -- the absence.

TESLA: (a beat; then distantly nodding) Never, as I can feel it looming now. (kisses the pigeon) I can feel her weakening. The flutter in her breast, fading.

CAMPBELL: I'm sorry.

TESLA: (to the pigeon) It will swell again, my dear one. It will. And you will be well.

Tesla becomes conscious he is being watched by Campbell. He looks to her.

TESLA: It is such a purer thing, the love I feel for this dear one-- than a man's love for a woman.

CAMPBELL: (slowly) How?

TESLA: She understands why I love her so.

CAMPBELL: (drawing a breath) I happen to love a man. We're engaged to be married in the spring. I believe I understand why

he loves me.

TESLA: Perhaps, with men and women in their youth, perhaps it's possible. Hey, my pet? But never was it possible for me. (to the pigeon) Before you.

CAMPBELL: (a pause; then boldly) We make love. My fiancée and I.

TESLA: Why do you tell me that?

CAMPBELL: Is that so terrible?

TESLA: It is no divulgence I care to hear. It's your private affair.

CAMPBELL: I'm willing to talk about it, Mr. Tesla. To you.

TESLA: You shouldn't be.

CAMPBELL: Why? I'm not ashamed of it. Or should I be?

TESLA: You are a fine young woman. Fine young women don't discuss such matters.

CAMPBELL: (laughing) I suppose we don't. And come to think of it, I never have. But you bring out-- I don't know -- with you I want to talk about it.

TESLA: I have no interest in your private life, Miss Campbell.

CAMPBELL: Mr. Tesla, I am trying to understand something that I simply cannot understand. How you can feel, what you claim to feel, for that bird. Have you ever made love, to a woman?

TESLA: (a long beat) I have made love.

CAMPBELL: When?

TESLA: You won't understand. (to the pigeon) You. You, my pet, will understand. The light in your eyes knows it.

Blackout.

TESLA: I have made love to the elements, Miss Campbell. But not with this body. With my lightning.

A coil crackles and snaps with sparks, stageleft. The sparks flame from it like snares of sudden light. Then huge fingers of the flame roar across the entire stage, to another coil. The discharges are twenty feet long. The stage is alive with artificial lightning. The young Tesla crosses in front of it, illuminated by it.

TESLA: Czito! Watch it! Watch it grow! Watch it leap!

CZITO: (o.s.) Be careful, Mr. Tesla.

CC

TESLA: The size of those streamers, Czito! And look how they dance to the secondary! Those aren't forks looking for the place to go, they're the fingers of some inconceivable potential, testing a sense of touch we know nothing of! Another hundred thousand volts, Czito.

Czito, in a lab jacket, rushes from stageleft, grabbing Tesla by a shoulder.

CZITO: Sir, at this voltage those bolts are unpredictable.

Czito draws Tesla back from the lightning.

CZITO: Sir. Can you smell that?

TESLA: Ozone, that's all.

CZITO: Nosir, the scorch.

TESLA: Ozone. Czito, when Prometheus stole that from the sky, he felt the exhilaration. But no one has known it since. To the controls, Czito. Another hundred thousand volts.

CZITO: Mr. Tesla, if that secondary is being damaged, those bolts will start shooting any which way. Please, sir. We haven't done this before. Can I turn it off? Can we look at that coil?

TESLA: My God, Czito. You're shaking.

CZITO: Please, sir. Please.

TESLA: As you wish, Czito.

Czito dashes stageleft. The enormous streamers cease to crackle; for a few minutes, smaller sparks snap from the big coil. Then the stage is utterly dark. Slowly, lights come up over the elder Tesla, Miss Campbell.

TESLA: (o.s., the older Tesla) That was 1890. I have made far bigger streamers. Sixty feet long. A hundred feet long. I have made lightning crackle from a great copper ball two hundred feet in the air, to a thousand points on the ground. Miles away, the sparks shot from pebble to pebble. Sparks leapt to the iron shoes of horses. You've seen lightning storm, Miss Campbell. I don't care what you've seen. Forked lightning of hundred million volts. I've made better lightning.

CAMPBELL: May I-- ask you, sir? Why?

TESLA: (old man's laugh) Why?

CAMPBELL: Why, make lightning?

TESLA: (the question confounds him) Why-- make-- lightning?

Tesla rises slowly, and holding the pigeon with enormous care, walks to the window.

TESLA: From this window I have watched the summer storms. The trunks of naked potential breaking open in the ion-charged sky. And thought only, how can any man ... (a beat) ... any woman... see that, and not feel in the presence of nature's most sacred power.

Tesla turns to Miss Campbell.

TESLA: Power, Miss Campbell. Power such as we have scarcely the wits and amplitude to dream. Progress, you know that word...

CAMPBELL: Europe is about to go to war. I know the word. I distrust it.

TESLA: (scoffing gesture) Wars. Technology will make an orphan out of war. No, the progress from the caves, the progress that's carried us to this. (gestures out the window) I tell you, Miss Campbell, that progress will only grow as the energy at our command grows. Look out there! Come here. Look.

Miss Campbell rises, somewhat reluctantly, to face the window opposite Tesla.

TESLA: The cars down there drive on petroleum. Barbarism! They plumes of smoke you see, that heat this city. More oil. We're spendthrifts, we of this century. Splurging the capitol of energy already in the ground, when we could draw our energy from the sources of lightning itself. And move it as lightning moves, in the air. Or through the earth itself. (a canny appraising look at her) You don't believe me.

CAMPBELL: (an embarrassed laugh) Mr. Tesla, I know nothing of science.

TESLA: I'm a debt-ridden old fool, clinging to a pigeon, talking delusion. Say so.

CAMPBELL: (taking her seat) I really have no way of knowing, Mr. Tesla.

TESLA: I do not take kindly to the prospect of making an ass of myself, Miss Campbell. Tell me what you think.

CAMPBELL: I think-- that making love, and making lightning have nothing to do with one another. I don't understand, how you could think they do.

Tesla chuckles. He slowly draws the curtain on the window.

CAMPBELL: Please. I'd like that open.

Tesla re-opens the curtains.

TESLA: I suppose you've been kind to me, in your way. As you wish.

CAMPBELL: How, is your friend?

Tesla walks to a lamp and tenderly looks into the pigeon's eyes. He kisses the beak.

TESLA: Her eyes languish. (to the pigeon) I am here, my love. I am not going to leave you. I know. It would be best if this woman would leave both of us. But she is hard in her decision. I don't know that she will leave us.

Tesla returns to the armchair, takes it.

CAMPBELL: You know why I can't, Mr. Tesla.

TESLA: No. No I do not.

CAMPBELL: I am only four weeks on this job. It matters to me, to keep it. Mr. Sampson made it clear enough that in the morning, there will be no pigeons in this room. You might find that a selfish reason. I would not be staying up-- (consults her watch) -- good Lord. Half past one. For anything else. Believe me.

TESLA: Then your Mr. Sampson is a cruel and uncaring man. (a beat) To both of us.

CAMPBELL: Staying here is my tactic. He never suggested it. Not a very bright tactic to boot.

TESLA: Agreed.

CAMPBELL: Thanks. Though I walked into it. Mr. Tesla. If I brought the cage up here. If you put your...friend into the cage. And stayed close by for awhile. Before we moved the cage downstairs. (a beat) Would that help?

TESLA: In a cage, she would be gone in minutes.

CAMPBELL: Why do you insist so much in believing that?

TESLA: (a long beat) If you had ever loved, as I love, you couldn't say such a thing.

CAMPBELL: But a pigeon. (rises abruptly, stalks around) I'm sorry. I find you an extraordinarily difficult person to understand, Mr. Tesla. I believe you. About the pigeon. About the lightning. But the more I believe you, the more difficult it is to understand you.

Tesla kisses the pigeon.

TESLA: In that, my dear woman, you are hardly alone.

CAMPBELL: But doesn't that, bother you? Don't you wish you could break through it? You must feel awfully alone.

TESLA: (voice fading) Indescribably. Yes.

CAMPBELL: Has anyone in your adult life understood you? Really?

TESLA: (sitting back, as if jarred) You ask pertinacious questions, Miss.

CAMPBELL: It's one-thirty in the morning and I can't even order up coffee. I'm sorry. I'm riding on my nerve ends.

TESLA: I could offer you whiskey. It's precious to me. Prove I'm an old fool.

CAMPBELL: I'm not here to drink. But thank you anyway.

TESLA: You are here waiting for my beloved to die. (to the pigeon) Forgive me, my sweet, forgive me. It is two of us now, riding on the ragged edges of our nerves. (to Campbell) You make me say things I regret. Bring me whiskey, please. You'll find it in that cabinet.

Miss Campbell goes to fetch a bottle of whiskey, less than half filled.

CAMPBELL: I'm sorry. And I think I would like to join you. Just a little one.

Tesla nods and Miss Campbell withdraws two small glasses, pours.

TESLA: You said you believed me about the lightning.

CAMPBELL: Yes.

TESLA: If I tell you other things, and tell them in good faith, would you believe those?

CAMPBELL: But why?

TESLA: If you cannot understand me, that is as it always has been. But here I am. A desultory old inventor who will die one of these years. Do you know what I will die with, Miss?

CAMPBELL: No.

TESLA: Then listen. Listen carefully. Ah, don't spill that. Gently. Gently. In 1894, the American Institute of Electrical Engineers asked me to show some of my researches. I will speak of one time, one cluster of experiments--

Blackout.

TESLA: (the elder Tesla, overvoice) For example, the direct application of high frequencies of voltage to my body. I called it my electrical bath. My body glowed, Miss Campbell.

Two soft lights come on, midstage, forestage, illuminating a podium. The younger Tesla stands at the podium, holding two wires by their insulating sleeves.

TESLA: Nine hundred thousand volts, my distinguished colleagues. At a frequency of three hundred thousand cycles per second.

The young Tesla grabs hold of the exposed wires, one in each hand and the effect is dazzling. His hair rises. His hands and face take on a weird luminosity. Slowly, he begins swaying slightly.

TESLA: This is not a spurious demonstration. Daily, I take these electrical baths. The curative properties of these voltages, at these high frequencies, are scarcely known to medical science. But I propose that within a decade, we will have the means to restore broken limbs and repair internal organs and even to assist in the cure of serious psychological diseases, with this technique.

HECKLER: (o.s.) Dr. Tesla, what's the real trick?

TESLA: Is that one of Mr. Edison's associates? You assume I should be electrocuted, yes? Either that, or this is not alternating current. Here. I will show you proof that it is alternating current. Czito, that steel bar.

Czito enters, carrying a steel bar that resembles a two-foot-long piece of railway track. This he sets on the flat podium. A light comes over it.

TESLA: Watch.

Tesla curls his hands into fists, places fingers down at two points on the ties. Smoke. The visible melting of the steel within moments. Tesla lifts his hands.

TESLA: Burns a bit. Czito, pass that to the skeptic in our audience.

Warty applause, offstage. Lights rise over the podium. Czito is off with the steel bar. Tesla lets go of the wires, smooths his hair.

TESLA: The uses of this "cold fire," as I call it, are still largely unexplored. But let me show you other devices whose uses I leave it to you to explore. Such as this coil, by which voltages can be stepped up or down.

Such as this resonant transformer, by which I can produce, or receive, Hertzian waves. Yes. What they call radio. I have demonstrated it in my laboratory, soon I will demonstrate it publicly. Such as this...telautomatic device, whose nature I cannot yet fully disclose, but which enables the remote control of vehicles, such as ships above or under water, or even missiles in the air...

Murmuring, some hostile, much astounded, rises o.s. from the audience.

TESLA: This I will demonstrate in public as well. Quite soon. Or this peculiar oscillator, which can send vibrations into the earth and receive them back again. Locating great mines of minerals. Or at sea, locating vessels, even those which wish not to be found. In my experiments with this oscillator, I have found that a building such as the largest steel structures in New York can be shaken and smashed to their foundations, in a matter of minutes. Look. I can so easily hold it in my hand. The same principle applies on anyscale you wish. With a device no larger than, say, this stage, I could split this very planet like an apple.

As the murmuring rises, the lights over Tesla begin dimming; the murmuring drowns out the voice; then goes quiet as lights rise on the elderly Tesla and Miss Campbell.

TESLA: (elderly) You know some of my inventions. You know radio. Most of them, I fear, you will never know.

CAMPBELL: That's crazy.

TESLA: What? You don't believe me?

CAMPBELL: Why would you build things-- they sound like important things--

TESLA: Oh, they are, they are.

CAMPBELL: That you'd want to die with.

TESLA: I don't wish to die with my discoveries. I have always, more than anything, wished to share them with the world.

CAMPBELL: Then why?

TESLA: A man must be careful. Even my patents for radio were stolen from me. I spent a decade in court with that scoundrel Marconi, proving it. Do the history books say so? It is painful, even with the patents.

CAMPBELL: But you, do own patents.

TESLA: Nine hundred? Something like that. Yes.

CAMPBELL: For things like-- radio? When your hotel bill for last month never-- Mr. Tesla. Excuse me if I'm so blunt. But it's crazy.

TESLA: (a beat) Perhaps it is.

CAMPBELL: Can you explain it?

TESLA: Is injustice ever in need of explanation, Miss Campbell?

CAMPBELL: This one. Just radio. I'm sure everytime one gets built, someone gets some money.

TESLA: RCA, yes.

Miss Campbell rises, goes to the window.

CAMPBELL: You said you're responsible for the current, all the lights out there.

TESLA: Westinghouse grew from my alternating current, yes.

CAMPBELL: That's crazy. You must see something, from something you invented.

TESLA: I've outlived the things I've patented and what I haven't patented, I'm old enough to know I won't.

CAMPBELL: I still don't understand. Did they have it in for you? Was that it?

TESLA: Perhaps, many did. I have long thought it a useless practice to search the motives of those who failed or betrayed me.

CAMPBELL: If they stole your stuff? That's insane. Why?

TESLA: (turning to the pigeon) It leads nowhere that I wish to go. (to the pigeon) As you would understand. Yes, my love?

CAMPBELL: Mr. Tesla, if you've done what you've said, and wound up -- I'm sorry, but here, it's like my father would say. Somebody muscled you off the track.

TESLA: You really don't understand. (a beat) You say there will be a war. I suspect so. I have offered my government -- our government -- the means of building a death ray that could stop incoming planes from a distance of hundreds of miles. It would be like a wall in space. Does the government come to me and offer me a laboratory? (a beat) They ask other scientists, what is this talk of Tesla's about a death ray? The other scientists who know so little -- it is scratchwork, what they know -- of high-energy potentials, tell the government, he is 84. He hasn't done a thing in decades, except spout craziness to reporters who'll listen. Now. Am I to blame those scientists for how little they know? Am I to

blame the government that listens to them? I will not let my soul be weighed by the clotted thoughts of fools, Miss Campbell. I ask only to be left in peace.

CAMPBELL: (a beat) That's scary.

TESLA: What? My death ray?

CAMPBELL: Believing you is scary. And I think I do believe you.

TESLA: What frightens you?

CAMPBELL: I'm not sure. But I think you'd know. Better than I ever could. I mean, it must frighten you too.

TESLA: (a long beat) Not anymore.

CAMPBELL: (intimately) But what is it? You know what I'm talking about.

TESLA: Yes. I know it most intimately. Or I have. (to the pigeon) You are nodding your head, my beloved. Yes. If you can sleep, then sleep. (to Miss Campbell) We must try to speak less loudly.

CAMPBELL: (less loudly) Mr. Tesla, when people like that ignore you--

TESLA: Oh, they do worse than that, Miss Campbell.

CAMPBELL: But you know you're so much smarter than they are--

TESLA: Intuitive, perhaps.

CAMPBELL: How do you keep from hating them?

TESLA: Hate, Miss Campbell, is like a science that would give us energy by bursting matter apart. Do you follow?

CAMPBELL: No. I don't think so.

Tesla gently guides the nodding pigeon into one hand, holds out another.

TESLA: Here. Imagine in this palm, an atom. Mr. Einstein has said this atom contains great energy. Of course it contains energy! The content of all matter is but energy. We are simply too stupid to recognize what that truly means. Now. I could build a science that can smash this atom, and so, deliver to the world great energy. Bombs to devastate vast cities. Or energy contained like the atoms burst apart in our sun. But that science is divisive, Miss Campbell. The imagination that creates such a science is itself hostile to our real world. It is an imagination of overweening pride. It has the devil in it. And if that science goes forward, it will be like nations, governed less by any grand dream than by their hatred of other nations. This world that we can strip to its atoms, we hate, in the act of breaking apart those atoms.

CAMPBELL: I'm sorry. I'm not sure what you're saying.

TESLA: Never has anyone, to whom I've tried explaining this. (to the pigeon) Awake? Already? No, sleep my darling, try. You need the sleep.

CAMPBELL: You say, there can be hate in the way we draw our energy?

TESLA: Not only in the way we draw it. Hate that carries to the ways we use it. Hate spreads to contaminate everything it touches, Miss Campbell. You need only look at the last war.

CAMPBELL: All right. But I know nothing of atoms, really. Are there other ways to get--

TESLA: Energies of that scale? Yes. But they must be harmonious with the planet. They must lead to unification. Rather than to division. Think. To split this atom, I first divide it from all other atoms. I violate matter. Then in splitting it, I make an awesome violation. Whereas, with discoveries I have made, this earth would contain all our energy. We would draw it from the ground. As you already do, from a plug. Our automobiles would drive on electricity collected from the roads. Our houses would be wired to nothing so much as the foundation rods in their basements. And no fuels would be spent, no atoms would be burst.

CAMPBELL: That's possible? How?

TESLA: In a world where people are entitled to energy, as they are entitled to the oxygen in the air, it is possible, Miss Campbell. This is not such a world.

CAMPBELL: (a long beat) Could it be?

TESLA: There was a time when I believed so. Perhaps, at that time, perhaps then, yes. History can be like a tall building with such few windows. I looked into one of those windows. I haven't in almost forty years, seen one since.

CAMPBELL: When?

TESLA: In Colorado, in 1899.

Blackout, over which the elder Tesla continues speaking.

TESLA: I had gone to Colorado Springs to learn the secrets of lightning. And to follow that lightning, literally, from the rarified banks of the air, deep into the ground. It is where I made my greatest lightning. Where I challenged the storms in the skies, with storms of my own. Where I taught lightning to behave for me. To dance in ringlets and arabesques, to congeal into balls of fire more superheated than the surface of the sun.

Dim lights come up over the suggestions of Tesla's laboratory at Colorado Springs. Leftstage, a cylindrical meshlike metallic grid rises about twenty feet into the air. Stageright is a similar, flatter grid. Discharges snap from the rounded grid to the left. There is an enormously large snap. The younger Tesla steps to the center of the stage, holding a notebook, observing. An incredibly intense concentrate of the sparks appears to congeal on the upper portion of the lefthand grill. It frees itself from the metallic center with a ferociously loud crack. It rolls the radius of the cylinder, then, with eerie slowness, down the cylinder to the floor. It continues rolling across the floor, past Tesla, then stops. It spins wildly round on the floor, then retraces its path, across to the cylindrical grid, up its side, and back to its source. Another ferocious crack, as it disappears.

The young Tesla stands, taking notes. Behind him, huge streamers break free of the cylindrical grid and snap across to the stageright grid. They don't snap separately, as the earlier streamers did. They form a constant conduit of naked electricity. A wall of such streamers: four or five like the horizontals of a fence. Tesla quietly continues taking notes as they roar behind him.

TESLA: (elder, o.s.) Millions of volts danced over my head, past my shoulders. But that was barely the beginning of my true discovery.

The younger Tesla steps forward while the discharges lose their intensity and die. Curtains close over the suggestions of the Colorado Springs laboratory. The younger Tesla, making his notes, stands bathed in a spotlight.

TESLA: (elder, o.s.) At my laboratory I had built a magnifying transmitter, capable of sending powerful currents into the earth.

Behind the spotlit young Tesla, snakes of lighting snap from high above into various points on the stage. They continue as the elder Tesla's voice continues.

TESLA: (elder, o.s.) In an hour, I could pump hundreds of times more electricity into the earth than comes from the largest bolt of natural lightning. But I was using principles of resonance. Timing my strikes. Which was how I made my discovery. The earth is electrically resonant, as much as a small metal ball. The waves pass into it to spread to all points of it, and resonate back to the source. By timing my strikes, by adding to that resonance, I could swell the electrical content of the planet thousands and thousands of times over.

The lightning and spotlight go dark. Lights come up on the elder Tesla and Miss Campbell.

TESLA: Do you have any conception, what that means, Miss Campbell?

CAMPBELL: I'm sorry. This is so important you. I'm sorry.

TESLA: (a pause) It was a glimpse in a window, Miss Campbell. Just a glimpse. But now the window is gone.

CAMPBELL: Is that how cars would draw electricity, right out of the roads?

TESLA: It could have been.

CAMPBELL: Why won't it still work?

TESLA: Because you won't find an electrical scientist anywhere in the world right now who would tell you, it can be done.

CAMPBELL: But you said it can be. That you'd done it.

TESLA: I saw a glimpse in a window. (a beat) And now the window is gone. (to the pigeon) Hey. Hey, my love. You still cannot doze. See those eyes of yours. Hey?

Tesla holds the pigeon close, looking into its eyes.

TESLA: Like the fire is lost in the smoke. Ohh, my dear pet. My only beloved.

Tesla holds the pigeon to his cheek, soothing its feathers, whispering into its breast.

TESLA: Sleep. And I promise you. From that sleep you will awaken, hungry and sparkling in those wonderful eyes of yours. Wild and free. I promise you, my pet. I promise you.

CAMPBELL: (softly) You do love that poor bird.

TESLA: Poor? She is wealthier than you or I. Wealthier than the Morgans and the Astors.

CAMPBELL: I meant its condition. Her condition.

TESLA: I have treated hundreds of pigeons. I find them in the park, huddling away from the others. Or friends bring them to me. I have learned to diagnose dozens of ailments, and treat them accordingly. But what ails my beloved... It is a great mystery to me. Never have I seen the eyes of a bird cloud as hers do. And the flutter of her heart. It goes faint, then rises, only to go faint again.

CAMPBELL: Is there anything I can do?

Tesla looks at her.

CAMPBELL: No. All but that, Mr. Tesla. I can't go.

Tesla rises, walking the floor with the pigeon held to his cheek, back and forth, like a mother with a dying child.

CAMPBELL: How long have you known her?

TESLA: Years. She came to me, unlike the others. They flocked to my shoulders, to my head. Do you know what the name Tesla is famous for? More pigeons crowd on him than on any statue in Manhattan. But she was never one to do that. She would fly and beat a wing, oh, so sweetly, against my hand. Then she would fly to a place where she would wait. And I would feed the others. And I would ask the others to go. Then I would be alone. And I would join my beloved.

CAMPBELL: (rising, joining Tesla, looking at the pigeon close-up) I see pigeons every day. I should be able to tell the difference--

TESLA: Nowhere will you find one white as this one. Everywhere, but for the faint gray -- see it? -- at the tips of her wings?

CAMPBELL: Have you, named her?

TESLA: There is a name. It has never been spoken, but to her ears. Nor will it ever be spoken. But to her ears.

CAMPBELL: I understand. How long has she been like this, ill?

TESLA: Only this morning. I was working at my desk. She came to my window. She knew where I lived. But never before had she come inside, as she did this morning. She flew to my desk. And when I picked her into my palms, I knew.

CAMPBELL: May I?

Campbell holds up a hand, to pet the bird. Tesla hesitates, then allows Miss Campbell to give it a few gentle strokes.

TESLA: You feel the weakness in her? (drawing the pigeon back to his cheek) You can go on thinking that the department of health of the city of New York has anything to fear from her?

CAMPBELL: No.

TESLA: Then come the morning, you can send them away.

CAMPBELL: I wish I could.

TESLA: So you tell me.

Tesla sits, clutching the pigeon protectively.

TESLA: It leaves me in a spin of thoughts, Miss Campbell. They whirl like oscillations in one of my high-frequency coils. When you speak, you speak like a friend. When you act, it is to stay here and stay and stay. Is it to make an old man talk? Hey?

CAMPBELL: (flustered) Mr. Tesla, my job is on the line.

TESLA: You are not an agent. The Germans, maybe? Hey? The Russians?

CAMPBELL: That's ridiculous.

TESLA: (voice slowly in retreat) No. It is not at all ridiculous. (a long beat) Your fiancée, do you expect he will go into the war?

CAMPBELL: He thinks so. He doesn't see how America can stay out.

TESLA: (as if to himself) It will claim the remainder of the century, this war. As already the atom has claimed this century. (more to Campbell) I find myself wishing to believe you are an agent.

CAMPBELL: Mr. Tesla, I assure you. I am here on behalf of this hotel.

TESLA: Ah. And after the inspectors of the municipal health department have gone, what will you say about having spent the night in the room of a man on the seventh floor? (at her silence) You do not compromise yourself?

CAMPBELL: I'm trying not to have you evicted. Do you understand that?

TESLA: I don't know. Again you speak like a friend.

CAMPBELL: And that makes you suspicious. It shouldn't.

TESLA: My suspicions have as firm a foundation as my electrical science, Miss.

CAMPBELL: Toward me?

TESLA: Toward so many, so many... It pains me to think how many.

CAMPBELL: Why?

TESLA: (angry agitated laugh rising) Why? Why have my ideas been stolen and plundered by others? Why have the people who built empires upon my discoveries turned and treated me like a fly to be swatted from the wall? Why have the friends of one day become the most demeaning

Why have

and vicious critics of me another day? (suddenly, darkly) Scott. Scott preached my gospel once.

A light comes up stageright over a lectern where a well-dressed man in his thirties is addressing an audience. Lights dim, but stay on Tesla and Campbell.

SCOTT: The evolution of electric power began with the discoveries of Faraday in 1931. Today, in 1896, with the Niagara installation, we are witnessing the fullness of that evolution. The Tesla polyphase system is undoubtedly the most tremendous event in the history of electrical engineering.

TESLA/ELD (from his seat) Scott saw far. Scott was a friend. Yet when I came to Scott, not so many years later, with my new bladeless turbine...

The young Tesla enters stageright, lays a blueprint over the lectern.

TESLA/YNG Scott. Do you remember telling me once, that the blades of a turbine are like the weight of an aeroplane? Look at this.

SCOTT: (examining the blueprint) Exquisitely clever.

TESLA/YNG There are still small wrinkles. But imagine, Scott. Imagine! This could double the electrical capacity of a Niagara.

SCOTT: (with pained sympathy) Tesla, thousands of your earlier turbines are installed in so many sites--

TESLA/YNG: Yes, and with this on the market they'd be beaten so thoroughly-- Help me go to Westinghouse, or GE, Scott. (at Scott's silence) This will scrap every turbine in the world.

SCOTT: (a long hesitation) That...will make quite a pile of scrap.

Scott abruptly exits. The young Tesla stares after him, begins folding the blueprint. The light stageright goes dark. The lights rise over the elder Tesla and Miss Campbell in the hotel room.

TESLA/EDL: He was merely one! There were hundreds.

CAMPBELL: Did you ever sell-- what was it?

TESLA: The turbine? No.

CAMPBELL: Like I said earlier. I find all this scary.

Miss Campbell goes to the window, arms folded tightly as if she's shivering. She looks out.

CAMPBELL: The way you talk, they really had it in for you.
She takes an assessing sidelong look at Tesla.

CAMPBELL: But I can't believe it's all that simple.

TESLA: Cosmic pain is quite simple, Miss Campbell. Once you understand the principles involved.

CAMPBELL: You're talking about people hurting people. I don't think we'll ever understand the principles involved.

TESLA: People are automatons, Miss.

CAMPBELL: What?

TESLA: They are forces of energy propelled and ruled by other forces of energy. Only, some are more sensitive to those distant forces -- cosmic forces -- than others. A sensitive and observant being, like myself, can act with exquisite obedience to changing energies in the environment. But if I encounter another being, defective in that sensitivity, I feel a terrible discord, a shattering of the harmonics that exist between us and the cosmos.

CAMPBELL: (an assessing pause) People step on you. Only you don't see it that way. They're-- what? Influenced by cosmic rays?

TESLA: You will please not be facetious.

CAMPBELL: I'm not. But it sounds that strange, as if cosmic rays--

TESLA: You are talking to the man who discovered cosmic rays.

CAMPBELL: (a beat) By getting stepped on?

TESLA: No. In my laboratory. Miss. Like so many -- like almost all scientists -- you know nothing of the real forces ruling things. Or how we can understand those forces. Cosmic rays are miniscule. The wave size is miniscule. But their part in the beating of the energies upon us, that is also miniscule. Right now, as you stand there, waves pound through your skin and drum against your inner organs. Waves sent from showers of cosmic collisions. Waves sent from the palpitations at the surface of the sun. Waves you will never see, never touch, never taste. But even here. (raps the side of his head) They mysteriously interact with the secret waveforms in the brain. Your thoughts are not only your own, Miss Campbell. Nor are mine. They are miracles of cosmic interactions. Which is why thought is the most powerful of all energies.

CAMPBELL: (compliantly) All right.

TESLA: You do not understand, or you prefer not to understand?
(a beat) Miss. The energies of a single thought can dictate the motion of a universe.

CAMPBELL: How?

TESLA: Through invention. True invention. Most of the inventions of this world are not true. They are like knotted sheets given to us as ladders. The automobile! You have no idea how extravagantly wasteful that machine is. An elaborate system of preposterous waste. The aeroplane. It goes into the air, using so much fuel to account for the weight it carries, in carrying so much fuel. Like hoisting from a well with a leaking bucket. When aeroplanes could draw their energies from the skies around them.

CAMPBELL: I can't believe that if you could do that, no one would be interested.

TESLA: (a long breath) I can.

CAMPBELL: (a light laugh) Why not, though? Unless it wouldn't be safe...

TESLA: It has nothing to do with safety. Perhaps it has to do with this.

Tesla emphatically touches the arm of his chair.

TESLA: I can touch this. Like anyone can touch aeroplane fuel. The energies that charge the skies, or that quiver beneath our feet inside the planet— they are as mysterious and invisible to us as electricity.

CAMPBELL: But we have electricity. . . . y

TESLA: Yes. I never believed that having it so widely would stunt our curiosity about it. If there is electricity in the sky -- and there is -- if there is electricity in the earth -- and there is -- we are delirious to ignore it.

Tesla rises, goes to a lamp to look into the eyes of the pigeon.

TESLA: Do you know what electricity is, Miss?

CAMPBELL: Only what I was taught in school. Electrons, isn't that it?

TESLA: (a snort) Electrons. Tiny little...what? (voice rises explosively) Things! Particles that are explained for behaving so unlike any other particles, they are said to be charged. It is the obsession of our science, Miss, that all mysteries must be explained by things.

The electron is no more an explanation of electricity than the laws of aerodynamic flow can explain the flights and wheelings... (to the pigeon)... of my beloved. (to the pigeon) When you are well again, my sweet. When you are well.

CAMPBELL: Then, what is electricity?

TESLA: I don't know. No one knows. Perhaps it is the stroking that God gives his universe, mmh? I have never stopped imagining it might be. As a child, it was the first thought I ever had of an electric spark. I reached to pet our cat one time. I was six. The sparks shot from its fur, I jerked my hand away. My father laughed. It's static electricity, he said. The same thing that creates lightning. I thought, Is nature a gigantic cat? If so, who strokes her back?"

CAMPBELL: By now, you have a better idea than that, I'm sure.

TESLA: No. Oh, it will obey the laws we give to it. As my friend here will obey the cupping of my hands. But it so transcends those laws that we may as well imagine all the flights of all the birds from the beginning of time...in seeing the wings, of this dear one who cannot fly. (a beat) Someday, someone will learn the nature of electricity. It will be the most astounding and definitive event in the history of science.

CAMPBELL: Mr. Tesla. (edgy) I have to get some sleep. I'm going to get the cage. We are going to have to put your pigeon in the cage. I'm sorry.

TESLA: (a beat) Then I shall find another hotel.

CAMPBELL: At this hour?

TESLA: In the morning.

CAMPBELL: I must insist that as long as you are in this hotel, the bird be caged.

TESLA: When you touched her, was that what you felt? That she must be put away safely into a cage?

CAMPBELL: Sir. Between losing my sleep or my job or my patience, I'm afraid it's my patience that goes first.

TESLA: (half to himself) Youth. (to her) Miss. You and the city's department of health may find my friend objectionable. At this moment, as the life within her undergoes tremors and failings, she finds my hands and my breath indispensable.

CAMPBELL: I cannot sympathize with a pigeon, Mr. Tesla.

TESLA: I think, Miss, that has nothing to do with your impulse to make certain my friend dies before morning. True? You are terrified for one moment to sympathize with me.

CAMPBELL: (embarrassed laugh) Mr. Tesla--

TESLA: Tell me it is not true.

CAMPBELL: It is beside the point.

TESLA: You feel something. This old man who coos to a bird in the debris of his room. The more he speaks, the more you feel. Until your feelings are brought against a wall. Yes?

Slowly, Miss Campbell sits down.

CAMPBELL: (more intrigued than intimidated) What is that?

TESLA: You tell me, Miss Campbell.

CAMPBELL: I find you strange. I find some of the things you say-- I'm sorry. But they give me goosebumps. You talk about us like we're robots.

TESLA: As we are.

CAMPBELL: Then you talk about...I don't know. I only know, I'm not a robot. And you, whatever or whomever you are... you're not one, either.

TESLA: One day, Miss Campbell, science will learn to construct automatons as sensitive to the distant vibrations of the ether as you, or even me. When that day comes, you will step out of your shoes and a robot will step into them and they will never break stride. Ah. But I am not talking to you now, I am adding to a wall.

CAMPBELL: I think you are. But it's different. You mean to.

TESLA: (looking down, not at the bird) And I create it, when I don't mean to? Is that what you suggest?

CAMPBELL: You talk as if-- as if the thing you most believed in, wasn't human.

TESLA: Ah.

CAMPBELL: And it isn't.

TESLA: Human. (searching the eyes of his pigeon) Did you hear that, my sweet? Ohh. How the skies within you darken.

He draws the pigeon to his cheek, his face slowly rocking for her benefit.

TESLA: (not looking at Campbell) You are correct, Miss Campbell. Others have felt the same thing. Sometimes I have heard it said. Tesla is-- almost of another world. Tesla is like an alien among us. And the word you use. Human. You see, anything this word can mean, I would say, no, that is not a worthy thing for us to be, that is another bar of the cage within which we languish and yearn. Do you know what we should aspire to, Miss Campbell?

CAMPBELL: Aspire? You mean, like exploring the planets?

TESLA: Oh, that. Certainly. It is one of our great urgencies to get in touch with the other intelligences that inhabit our neighborhood of the skies. We will. It is only a matter of time. No. I mean, what we should dream for our grandchildren. What we should search most desperately in our science.

CAMPBELL: A better life, obviously.

TESLA: Iceboxes and radios and televisions? That is a better life?

CAMPBELL: Isn't it?

TESLA: It is the faintest beginning of the real life we do aspire to. You are a throbbing cell, Miss Campbell. I am a throbbing cell. This planet right now is our body, or form. Oh, we do badly at it, though. We live on it like we were parasites. But imagine. Imagine that through a nervous system -- not of wiring, but of the air itself and the earth itself, we were to become a single intelligent organism. Sharing every palpitation, every vibratory resonance from afar. (touches the chair edge) As my body can share that touch. You should share the touch of anyone, anywhere.

CAMPBELL: Why would I want to?

TESLA: Ah. See. You describe to me the bar of a cage.

CAMPBELL: No. I dread becoming an ant in an ant colony.

TESLA: It is a model. Finally, perhaps, not that helpful a model. No. I speak of cells in a brain, large as our earth. And the speed of any thought through that earth would be faster than the speeds of any thought in your brain right now.

CAMPBELL: You expect that will happen?

TESLA: In an age that worships the atom and the powers of the atom, no.

CAMPBELL: I'm getting the impression you blame the atom for everything. Aren't you made up of atoms?

TESLA: The meat machine is made of atoms. A thought is made up of electrical waves that oscillate at the most remarkable frequencies in the universe.

CAMPBELL: I see.

TESLA: You haven't a clue what I'm talking about, have you? Someday, Miss, your children or your grandchildren will share my profound distrust of the atom. It has the power to plunge history into eternal darkness. They will taste that power. I hope they will learn to despise it as I despise it, and search another power.

CAMPBELL: Electrical power, no doubt.

TESLA: Resonant electrical power. Yes.

Tesla begins drumming on a tabletop. Faster and faster drumming.

TESLA: Trifling sound waves, Miss Campbell. But waves. The real behavior of resonant waves is more mysterious than the faces of unseen planets. But more marvelous. Take a violin and a shallow pan of very fine sand. I did this as a child. Put the pan atop the strings, then strike the bow along the strings. It will create a figure. Shake the sand and strike the bow again. It will create another figure. In every figure you will see the shadow of an unimaginable harmonic source.

CAMPBELL: I can hear the violin. That's not unimaginable.

TESLA: What you are hearing is a fraction of the vibratory universe created in that bow sliding against strings. Unimaginable, I tell you. And sound waves are but nothing. The most sluggish and crude of all the waves that I have studied. You will find the same principles of inconceivable harmonics — principles that I have barely tapped -- in Hertzian waves...

CAMPBELL: Hertzian?

TESLA: Radio. Or the mysterious waves that we create by thinking. Or light waves. Or x-rays. Or even cosmic rays. Miss Campbell, I tell you, the real universe is bound together by the harmonies that resonate from all these waves. When we have learned to tap those harmonies, we will have advanced in one day farther than we have advanced from fashioning stones into axes in a cave.

CAMPBELL: And you know secrets of this stuff--

TESLA: The deeper nature of these harmonics? I do.

CAMPBELL: That you'd rather not share with anyone. So you said.

TESLA: (stiffly) I do.

CAMPBELL: I should go home. I feel I am talking to a wall. Why in God's name do you sit there, griping that no one will listen to you, when at the same time you're not willing to divulge what you really know?

TESLA: (affronted) I have tried.

CAMPBELL: Yes. I'm sure you have. I had best go get that cage.

TESLA: (to himself) Perhaps not, well enough. Sit. Miss. Sit. I will tell you how I tried. You have heard the name of the great Morgan? Mr. Pierpont Morgan?

CAMPBELL: Who hasn't?

TESLA: He gave me money to build the laboratory of my dreams. Wardenclyffe. On Long Island. Early, very early, in this century. From Wardenclyffe I could have sent radio waves across the ocean. Years before Marconi. I could have sent vast potentials of energy through the air or into the earth. I could have demonstrated remote control of vehicles and automaton at distances of thousands of miles. I could have experimented with waves I scarcely knew, on a planetary scale that would have demonstrated the extraordinary receptivity of our earth and our atmosphere and our weather to subtle wave harmonics. Sit, Miss. I had built the tower. I had spent the first installments of Mr. Morgan's money. Then his stocks went down. The financial world felt little earthquake tremors. And he struck my project from his books.

Lights appear over a splendid desk, stageright, behind which sits the imperious Morgan. Enter the young Tesla. In the background, lights dim but don't go off on the elder Tesla and Miss Campbell.

MORGAN: Two minutes, Tesla.

TESLA/YGR: Sir. I would not disturb you if it were anything less than the success of the most important project you have ever backed.

MORGAN: Don't waste your two minutes on hyperbole, Tesla.

Morgan has been writing, and continues writing.

TESLA: Sir. For one hundred thousand dollars I can complete the tower. I can prove that wireless transmission of energy is real. That it can work.

MORGAN: I don't doubt that you can. (Looks up) You're a damn fool, young man, to talk to the biggest shareholder

of the General Electric Company about that particular scheme of yours. General Electric owns three out of every four miles of transmission cable. Did you know that?

TESLA: Of course I know that, sir.

MORGAN: The day your wireless system proved itself, you know what my GE stocks would be worth?

TESLA: Mr. Morgan, you would own controlling interest in my new system.

MORGAN: Wrong, Tesla. (a beat) I already do. (glances at his watch) One minute. (resumes his writing)

TESLA: Sir, with wireless transmission, the speed of delivering electricity, particularly to rural areas--

MORGAN: Alva. That Tom Edison's middle name?

TESLA: I believe so.

MORGAN: Queer as the deuce, isn't it. Go on.

TESLA: You don't want to see Wardenclyffe completed, do you Mr. Morgan? (gathering confidence) Not even for radio. Radio we could broadcast from here to Europe.

MORGAN: (still writing) My advisors don't see a whole lot of revenue in some Scotsman listening to the New York Philharmonic. Not unless he buys a ticket.

TESLA: He'd have to buy a radio.

MORGAN: When I run passengers on my New York Central, do you think I let them use the first ticket they ever bought? Time, Tesla. I appreciate your coming by.

Tesla backs off a few steps.

TESLA: I'll find other investors. Wardenclyffe will work yet.

MORGAN: At my say so.

TESLA: Sir. Do you have any idea, what you are depriving the world of, in holding up progress on that tower?

MORGAN: (a flick of a glance up) A free ride. Good day, Tesla.

TESLA: What has this been? All the meals you've asked me to dine with you? All the interest in my discoveries? Some...some sort of, insurance that they wouldn't threaten your interests? Is that it? That is. That is.

MORGAN: (to his intercom) Mulvahill. Kindly come in here and

escort Mr. Tesla from my office. (a glance to Tesla) You figure out how to sell wireless anything by the ticket, Tesla, this door will open up to you again.

Morgan resumes writing. Enter a heavy who takes Tesla by the arm.

TESLA: (as he's dragged away) Is it only money to you? It that everything? People are what to you, Morgan? No more than flies?

Tesla has been dragged offstage. Morgan makes a few dry private chuckles, talks to himself without looking up.

MORGAN: Only when I can't put them to work.

Morgan continues writing. Lights dim over the desk, rise on the elder Tesla and Miss Campbell.

TESLA/ELDR: It took me fifteen years to accept, it was the end of my tower.

CAMPBELL: Fifteen years. (rises) I had best get that cage.

TESLA: You don't believe me?

CAMPBELL: I don't see that believing you makes a damn bit of difference.

TESLA: (a long beat) Earlier, I thought perhaps it did.

CAMPBELL: Earlier I wasn't so beat.

Tesla rises, more abruptly than he has all evening, and goes to a point near Miss Campbell where he looks into her eyes.

TESLA: Your eyes are vibrant, Miss Campbell. (returning to his chair) You are more awake than when you first came to me tonight.

CAMPBELL: (unnerved) Is that so.

TESLA: The eyes tell more than we know how to read. In time we will learn to photograph thought itself off the retina of the eye. I think you have gone, Miss, from finding my pigeon objectionable, to finding me objectionable.

CAMPBELL: M-Mr. Tesla...

TESLA: There is no need to stammer any protestations. I am not accusing you of anything. I am simply...curious. It has happened to me so ... frequently, in 84 years. And I still don't understand why.

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CAMPBELL: I'm not sure I do either. I should go get that cage.

TESLA: Sit down, Miss Campbell.

CAMPBELL: Mr. Tesla, I am sorry.

Tesla is looking into the eyes of the pigeon. His voice trembles.

TESLA: There is no need to get a cage.

CAMPBELL: Is your pigeon--?

TESLA: Very shortly. (forcefully) Sit down. Please. (to the pigeon) Oh, my beloved, my one love of all time. Your spirit is so light. I feel it, preparing to fly from me. Can I sustain these heavy days without you? My life will be emptier than all the emptiness of empty space. Oh, my darling, my darling.

Tesla bends his face to the pigeon in gentle, caressing kisses. Miss Campbell sits in sizzling annoyance.

CAMPBELL: (through the annoyance) I am sorry.

TESLA: Yes. So you tell me. Miss Campbell, I have no idea if this will mean an iota of anything to you. But you are witnessing what no one since my parents have witnessed, at the time my older brother died. I have closeted my grief. I have kept love sequestered from anyone's eyes. And it means what? Seeing my grief and my love now? That an old man is crazy?

CAMPBELL: No, anything but.

TESLA: (to the pigeon) You must forgive me, my love. But this woman who has invaded our lives must show us, ah? If she is as stupid and insensitive as a cork bobbing in waters that are choppy with waves she will never understand-- or (looking up at Miss Campbell)... if she has intuited something which she will not easily express, but which could help an old man live with what has gone before.

CAMPBELL: Mr. Tesla, whatever it is you want of me--

TESLA: I want to know why this mind has been buried alive half a century, Miss Campbell. (a beat) Hundreds of people could have told me. None did. Most are dead now. You know.

CAMPBELL: I do not know. (a laugh) Why would I?

TESLA: Because you have travelled from sympathy to scorn. No. Perhaps you have not yet reached that destination of scorn. Perhaps you will.

CAMPBELL: The way you're talking, that shouldn't be so difficult.

TESLA: Ah. The destination is in sight.

CAMPBELL: Mr. Tesla. I do get the impression you are asking me to treat you, the way you accuse others of treating you.

TESLA: Only now that you approach a destination, perhaps.

CAMPBELL: Why? (anger rising) So that you can add another scar to wherever it is you've been punched up all your life? I did give a damn earlier. Yes. And I don't give a damn right now. True. But don't lace on the contempt, old man, and really rile me into saying what I'm starting to think.

TESLA: But that is what I wish to learn, Miss Campbell. You see. You do not find me a quaint old survivor who dithers with wild ideas and makes sweet talk to a pigeon. No no no. This man disturbs you, oh does he disturb you, like an itch you cannot scratch and fear will soon be wild inflammation.

CAMPBELL: Don't flatter yourself. I can scratch an itch and I will. You act like everybody, everybody is wrongheaded except yourself.

TESLA: (humbled) Yes. Yes. That has been a failing.

CAMPBELL: Failing? It's more like being handcuffed to a tree on Mount Olympus. Which is frankly, kind of how I see you, old man. Standing all alone up in those winds. And even the tree you're handcuffed to is bending. You aren't.

TESLA: That would help? That I would bend with the same winds others bend to?

CAMPBELL: Je-sus Christ. Have you been drunk? Gutter-stink-in-your face drunk?

TESLA: In my youth. Yes.

CAMPBELL: Have you screwed a woman? I asked that earlier. You gave me crazy talk about a lightning fuck.

TESLA: Miss.

CAMPBELL: I am scratching an itch, old man. Have you screwed a woman?

TESLA: (a long beat) No. Never.

CAMPBELL: MiGod I believe that. Eighty-four and you've never....wow..

Why not? You can't tell me there wasn't lack of opportunity.

TESLA: There was opportunity. I chose not to.

CAMPBELL: (angry laugh riding through) You know, the first time I laid eyes on you tonight, I picked that up. It's in your walk. In the way you move. Like, you and your body have never really gotten to know each other. The way they do once you've started screwing.

TESLA: Miss.

CAMPBELL: Jesus, even the words fuck you over. You asked me to get riled, old man, I am riled. When I'm riled I talk rough. Get used to it. Now tell me. How come you never never never did what you were born with the balls to do? And it's not like you don't have the balls, you got more of 'em than just about anyone I've met.

TESLA: Miss Campbell, I apologize I've raised this—

CAMPBELL: I am scratching an itch. You started this. You ride with me. How come?

TESLA: It seemed— (falls silent)

CAMPBELL: Seemed what? Out! Say it. Seemed what?

TESLA: (long pause) Inelegant.

CAMPBELL: In-elegant. You'll have to translate for me.

TESLA: (to himself, with difficulty) The harmonies of life as I have known life seemed, violated.

CAMPBELL: Oh. Like, it's too uh, hard-breathing and animal — something like that?

TESLA: Miss. I have been sensitive since my childhood to the most subtle vibratory influences. A ticking watch. A mote glinting in a ray of sunshine. And the far, far subtler influences of those pulsations known only through their effects, in the spins and turbulences they provoke within my inner moods and the manner of my thinking. (with difficulty) It occurred to me as a young man, perhaps I would find someday a woman with a... similar sensitivity. Perhaps, if I did, it would be possible to share the conjugal act of the marriage bed. Never did I find such a woman.

CAMPBELL: Okay. Fair enough. You never married. But never making love?

TESLA: (a long pause) Unless the woman was that woman, Miss, I would have drowned -- gone wildly out of control -- in the pounding of an alien heartbeat.

Miss Campbell rises, walks to the window, looks out, then looks at Tesla.

CAMPBELL: That's all? A woman's heartbeat?

TESLA: (looking down) You have no idea what it is to fear such a thing, Miss. But I have feared it. Terribly.

CAMPBELL: (gently) And wanted it.

TESLA: Oh yes. Just as terribly. (a beat) More terribly.

CAMPBELL: (staring nakedly at Tesla) And you have never felt it, in your life? A woman's heartbeat?

TESLA: Only my mother's. From the earliest age I can recall.

CAMPBELL: You didn't drown in that, though.

TESLA: It was not an alien heartbeat, Miss.

CAMPBELL: I see.

Miss Campbell goes and sits on the bed.

CAMPBELL: I wish there were some way of telling you, Mr. Tesla, that no woman's heartbeat is exactly...alien.

TESLA: Perhaps not to you. Perhaps not to other men.

CAMPBELL: I guess there is no way of telling you.

TESLA: This heartbeat. (the pigeon nearer his face) This is the one I have known intimately. It is not at all alien. (to the pigeon) Oh my precious. My love. How it faintly flutters. How it ceases to wish. Oh my precious.

CAMPBELL: (a long beat) Mr. Tesla.

TESLA: Yes.

CAMPBELL: What you asked earlier, how I could go from...sympathy, to what I was feeling. I believe I could tell you. If you care to hear it.

TESLA: (as if entranced) I feel my beloved dying. I feel the life to which she clings growing slippery, like a rock in an awful sea.

Tesla lifts the pigeon, looks into its eyes, bolts his head back as if in alarm, opens his mouth as if to scream. There is no scream. He holds in that pose for several seconds. Miss Campbell leaps to him

but touches neither Tesla nor the pigeon.

CAMPBELL: (after a long pause) Mr. Tesla? Are you all right?

TESLA: (still semi-entranced) Did you see it?

CAMPBELL: See what?

TESLA: Her eyes. The clouds over them parted. And the light that came from them. Real light. Astounding light. Light so dazzling. Light so blinding. Light more powerful than the most intense lights I have ever created in my laboratory. (aware of Miss Campbell) You must have seen it!

Miss Campbell gently takes the dead pigeon from Tesla's hands.

CAMPBELL: She's...she's died.

TESLA: (staring fixedly into space) A light more dazzling than any light ever to be created in any laboratory.

CAMPBELL: I'll just...excuse me a moment, Mr. Tesla.

Miss Campbell exits with the dead pigeon. Tesla rises, walks a few steps forward. He is still locked in a kind of trance.

TESLA: A light of the purest vibrations, I have ever seen. Or ever will see. Ohhh, my beloved.

Tesla looks down into his empty palms, only slowly reacting to the absence of his dear pigeon. Re-enter Miss Campbell.

TESLA: My pigeon. Where is it?

CAMPBELL: (touching his arm) Your pigeon has died, Mr. Tesla.

Tesla makes a few tottering steps back toward the chair.

TESLA: Yes. Yes, I know.

Tesla sits.

TESLA: She showed me the way into death. It is a way into light. Such a pure, pure, strange light.

CAMPBELL: Is there anything I can do, sir?

TESLA: Leave me.

CAMPBELL: Of course, Mr. Tesla.

TESLA: No. I- I am suddenly... (looking around) ...terrified to be alone. A lifetime alone and for once I cannot bear being alone. (almost a whimper) Could you stay?

CAMPBELL: (a beat) Yes. I could stay.

TESLA: She must be buried, my dear one.

CAMPBELL: This is...January, Mr. Tesla.

TESLA: So it is. Then, then I will build her a funeral pyre. I will send her body to the skies rather than the earth. Yes. Like Philoctetes. Like his gift to Heracles.

CAMPBELL: Philoctetes? Heracles?

TESLA: Heracles could find no one to set fire to his funeral pyre. Except the young Philoctetes. Who did not fear fire. He lit the pyre and the last act of Heracles was to give the young Philoctetes his magic bow. Philoctetes could never miss, shooting with that bow. It was during the Trojan war. They sent for Philoctetes. With his bow they could be victorious. They had to cross a sea. Crossing the sea, a serpent rose its head from the water and snapped off the foot of Philoctetes. The stump festered and swelled and its stink was so awful that they pulled to an island and left off Philoctetes. There he lay, on the island, while the war raged, while his comrades were helpless without his magic bow. They came back for the bow. They took it. Leaving Philoctetes to fester in his stink. But with the power of Philoctetes at the bow, the bow was useless. Useless.

CAMPBELL: That— isn't the end of the story. Is it?

TESLA: In my mind I have given it so many other endings, Miss, I could not tell you, which ending the Greeks gave to it. Now the ending I would give you— do you want it?

CAMPBELL: Yes.

TESLA: I would have them come back in great reluctance for their stinking comrade. They would find that he had died.

CAMPBELL: No, no, Mr. Tesla.

TESLA: And beside him, they would find a pyre. Like the pyre he had built for Heracles. Only, never would that pyre burn. There would not be, you see, another Philoctetes, gifted with the gift of fire. The pyre would instead be like a monument. Blown by the winds and ransacked by the elements. It would be Philoctetes' reminder to the ages that followed that, yes, once in time, a man had been gifted with the gift of fire.

CAMPBELL: You make it sound so eerily familiar, sir.

TESLA: Our minds each have peculiar vibratory pitches, Miss. Certain stories are subharmonics to those pitches.

Tesla rises and goes to the window, looks out.

TESLA: The south sky beats with a ragged little light. The hue of my beloved's wingtip. Is she busy now, creating the color of the dawn? Altering the frequencies of light as they are born in the turbulences of the sun? Do you think?

CAMPBELL: Yes. Yes, I think.

TESLA: Of all the frequencies that I have studied in my laboratories, none have explained the merest fluctuation of the sunlight, as it touches here. There are other resonances at play. Resonances... oh, my love, my love.

Tesla slaps two open hands to the glass of the window.

TESLA: Is this how I will know you now? The only way that I will know you? In the palpitations of an early dawn? In the cresting of a lightning stroke that strikes to earth as you once struck so sweetly to my hand? Is this all you can leave me of yourself?

Miss Campbell rises, worried for Tesla at the window.

CAMPBELL: Please, Mr. Tesla. Please.

TESLA: (to the window) I care nothing of this world if all it can give me are those shadowy reminders of you, my beloved.

CAMPBELL: Mr. Tesla, please don't agitate yourself.

TESLA: (turning to her) My life has ended, Miss. What point is there in telling me not to agitate myself?

CAMPBELL: Please. Sit down.

Tesla pulls the curtain on the window.

TESLA: It beats exactly like her wingbeat. I cannot bear to go on looking.

Tesla accepts Miss Campbell's arm, goes to the bed, sits weirdly erect.

CAMPBELL: The kitchen may be open. I could call down for some coffee. Perhaps some breakfast for you. On the house.

TESLA: No.

CAMPBELL: Sir. You're shivering.

Miss Campbell rises, fetches a blanket that she puts over Tesla's shoulders. She sits beside him.

TESLA: Thank you. It is true. I am cold. But from now on, I think I will always be cold. Miss. You don't know. All the work I thought that one day I would finish. (a long beat) I am a ghost, awaiting his appointment with the grave.

CAMPBELL: Mr. Tesla. You shouldn't talk like that. You are a brilliant inventor. From what I gather, you are probably one of the greatest inventors who ever lived.

TESLA: My inventions don't belong to me.

CAMPBELL: They belong to the world.

TESLA: The world may have them. (tightens his huddle beneath the blanket) I wish to know nothing of that. This world may do as it likes. I belong elsewhere now.

CAMPBELL: (a long look at him) And you never have, before.

TESLA: No.

Tesla is a remote huddled figure within the blanket, as withdrawn from Miss Campbell as a rock. She slowly reaches within the blanket, taking Tesla's hand.

CAMPBELL: Sir. May I-- may I show you something?

Tesla does not reply. Miss Campbell withdraws Tesla's hand and rapidly undoes several buttons on her blouse. She slides the hand within her blouse, over her left breast.

CAMPBELL: I want you to feel that, sir. Please? Feel it? My heartbeat.

Tesla's downturned head rises only minimally. But he does not withdraw his hand. Lights slowly dim over the stage. The tableau of the two does not move. Darkness.

Curtain.

End of Act II

Set