

Light is the Key

“It would be a huge understatement to say that something dramatic happened to Nikola Tesla early in eighteen ninety five. He had money, good health and his own laboratory in South Fifth Avenue. Nikola had theories about X-Rays and transmitting power without cables. Fame and fortune should have been his, but something happened to him, something ‘dramatic’. At last the truth can be told.”

“You may live to see man-made horrors beyond your comprehension.”

— Nikola Tesla

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Nikola Tesla wasn't designed to lose himself in a crowd. Not that there was a crowd on the pavement in South William Street. A few citizens of New York, going about their business, some looking at the six foot two scientist, with such a serious look on his face. Thin too, thin enough to look frail for such a tall man.

“Did you remember to eat today ?”

Peter was sure to ask him when he returned home. Peter Kaplan his faithful servant, confidant and friend. Just about the only person he trusted after the Edison business. Today at least he could say he ate well, at Delmonico's no less. Nikola knew Delmonico's well, though he'd never have described himself as a regular of the establishment. Strange and worrying that Jules Strauss had chosen to meet there, it hinted at knowing his life, his movements and routines.

“Move back a bit mister.”

He did, to allow two men carrying a crate to pass. No good, he'd have to cross the road and enter the restaurant soon. Why the hesitancy about lunch in a public place ? It was just that the mysterious Strauss knew a lot about him and his work, yet he knew nothing at all about him. Save for an address in Bridgeport, which he'd used to arrange their meeting by letter.

“Am I crazy to meet a stranger like this ?” He muttered.

The men were back with another crate. Nikola had to cross the road, or become an obstruction to the flow of commerce. He crossed the road and looked in the restaurant window. A lot of men inside, anyone of whom might be Jules Strauss. There had been a lot of letters from Strauss over a period of about a year. The one which had led to lunch at Delmonico's, was in his jacket pocket.

‘Mr Nikola Tesla – Tesla Electric Company

4th floor of 33-35 South Fifth Avenue

My dear Nikola.’

That was how the man had always written to him. It implied a closeness, a friendship at some point in the past. No sane man would address a complete stranger in such a fashion.

“This Strauss has written to you over a hundred times and is obviously deranged. On no account should you meet him in private.” Peter had told him. “Suggest somewhere public, a restaurant maybe.”

Peter could be a little presumptive for a servant, but he did have his best interests at heart. Nikola would never have met Strauss, if it hadn't been for the letter, which was folded up carefully and resting in his pocket. He actually felt for it, as if checking it was still there.

‘.....your patents on Polyphase electricity have made you wealthy, though I doubt if money for its own sake, really interests you. Light is the key to everything, not electricity. Light brings its own dangers though, which we should discuss.’

Up to that point the letter might well have been yet another rambling pile of nonsense. He had a filing cabinet of such letters, all neatly filed away and ignored. He had a certain fame now, a little notoriety. Letters from crazy people was part of the price paid for such fame. The final part of the letter though, was beyond the mind of any crazy person to put on paper.

‘..... I saw burns on your left hand the other day and noted some awkwardness in using your left arm. I assume you’ve been experimenting on yourself again, doubtless with X-Rays. They are dangerous my dear Nikola, far more dangerous than you realise. I earnestly implore you to cease burning your tissues with X-Rays.’

That letter, the impossible letter which had brought him to Delmonico’s at lunchtime, had ended with.

‘..... I would still like to meet you to discuss your research. Might I suggest lunch at Delmonico’s at 2 South William Street, perhaps a week from this Tuesday ? Please write to me with an acceptance. Your friend always, Jules Strauss.’

Friend always ?! As far as he knew he’d never met this Jules Strauss and his memory was famously good. He could read a book once and remember every word. If he’d ever been a close friend of Strauss, he’d most certainly have remembered it.

“I must go Peter..... Send a letter confirming it. This letter he has sent is impossible, an anomaly beyond explanation. He mentions X-Rays, yet everyone calls that particular electro magnet energy, Roentgen Rays. Only I have thought about calling them X-Rays and only in my private journals and letters to Wilhelm Roentgen. It is impossible for Straus to know about this, yet he knows. I must meet him Peter, it is essential.”

Nikola walked into the restaurant, nodding at one or two people he recognised. He didn’t fit in with the avant-garde atmosphere of Delmonico’s, never had and never would. He loved the food though and he loved being recognised. A waiter approached, smiling as he recognised a semi-regular customer.

“Mr Tesla..... Yes, your friend mentioned you were expected.”

Friend, the damn man was telling the world they were friends. The waiter led him to a table well back from the windows, but still well-lit by the midday sunshine. The man standing to greet him looked so ordinary. About five feet ten, with a slim figure and a vaguely European look about him, though it was hard to define why. Nikola took in his face in an instant though and would remember it forever.

“I am so glad you accepted my invitation. I am Jules Strauss.”

Yes, something about the vowels indicated Eastern Europe, maybe even as far east as the Balkans. He prided himself in being something of a polyglot, speaking and reading eight languages, perfectly.

“You did pick one of my favourite restaurants.” Replied Nikola.

There was something about the way Strauss moved as he sat down, something strange and unique. Hard to define though, a way he had of bending his lower body. Nikola decided not to dwell on it, as there were more important matters to think about. The waiter returned to take their order and Jules ordered chicken soup to start and then lamb with a few seasonal vegetables. Nikola was tempted to test his host’s generosity, by ordering the most expensive offerings on the menu. He resisted the temptation.

“Is the lamb good ?”

“Yes Mr Tesla.”

“Then I’ll have the lamb too.”

Small talk over the starter, Nikola learned that Strauss had a small laboratory at his house in Bridgeport.

"I have my own version of your famous Tesla coil." Said Strauss. "You must come and see my physics lab some time."

Nikola smiled politely, but had no intention of going to Bridgeport. A modified Tesla coil indeed ! The man didn't seem to realise how deeply that insulted him. As the lamb arrived, he decided to bring up the topic which had most concerned him.

"There was something in your letter which caught my attention. You used the term X-Rays to describe a form of energy few understand and the few who do, would call Roentgen Rays. May I ask where you heard the term X-Ray ?"

Strauss didn't seem at all put out by the question, even smiling between mouthfuls of the rather good lamb.

"It seemed a good way to describe something unknown." Replied Strauss. "We can call them Roentgen Rays if you'd prefer ? We speak the same language of science old friend, just with different dialects."

"You keep calling me an old friend, yet I'm sure we've never met before today."

That seemed to cause Strauss to think for a few seconds.

"We have never met before Nikola, but I've read everything I can find about you and just feel..... As though I've known you for a very long time."

So that was it, nothing sinister at all. Strauss was just a fan of science, albeit a very persistent one. As for the term X-Ray... He had come up with it himself as meaning the unknown and it wasn't surprising that another had gone through the same thought process. Tesla wasn't sure if he was relieved or disappointed. Out of politeness really, he found himself asking.

"I myself have suspected that light is an important force in our world. You mentioned something about it being the key to everything in your letter. You also mentioned dangers of some kind, associate with experimenting with light. Perhaps you'd like to explain that further ?"

There was that odd way of moving again, as Strauss shuffled forward on his chair.

"Yes, yes of course. That was my main reason for asking you to join me for lunch. Light is the key of course, expanding the universe, while defining time and space. It also limits our ability to travel to the stars. Perhaps that is by the design, the placing of bars around a cage..... Or perhaps, just maybe....."

Tesla was sure that his expression must have stopped Strauss from continuing. He was constantly being told by Peter that his serious expression might well frighten horses in the street. It was just that he was beginning to realise that Strauss might have a mind equal to his own.

"Carry on, carry on... I have heard others with good minds say similar things about light.

Mathematicians mostly, covering blackboards with their ideas. Tell me more of your thoughts ?"

"My dear friend, I came here to warn you, perhaps even to discourage certain areas of research. I saw by your expression that I might well have encouraged that which I intended to deter, a course of action, which might be disastrous. They are out there you see, everywhere and they travel within the light."

Nikola was annoyed now. It seemed Strauss might be just another religious crazy man, come to warn him about interfering in the works of God, or some similar nonsense. There had been quite a few of them over the years. Mad men accusing him of meddling with forces best left alone.

"I warn you Strauss, I have little patience with religious nonsense of any kind. Tell me who is this 'they' you are talking about ? Be clear and precise, or I will be leave you to finish your lunch alone."

He almost felt sorry for Strauss, who was fidgeting about and looking upset.

“Being precise is a difficult thing when dealing with..... Them. They do not belong in our world at all, or so I believe. Nor do I believe they intend to kill and injure. Just the slightest touch from them can kill though, in a truly dreadful manner. I myself was just touched slightly, for a fraction of second and..... Well you may see my injury in private if you wish. As to a name ? I can't be certain of anything but I believe they are the origin of what ancient religions referred to as elementals. The closest depiction I've seen of them was in a Mayan carving, so lifelike it made me suffer from nervous debility for days. No name was legible on the carving, though reference was made to devils of the thunder.”

“You say you've seen these things ?” Asked Nikola.

“Yes, three times I've bent the laws of physics to allow them access to our world and each time there has been extreme danger from doing so. The first time a lab assistant was reduced to nothing but a heap of dry ash. The second time..... You must have noticed I have an awkwardness when sitting or standing ?”

“I did, but politeness made me refrain from mentioning it.”

Strauss flinched, as if remembering a grievous injury.

“That was from being over confident, the slightest touch.... The wound almost killed me and without the best doctors.... I live though and the pain I feel from sitting reminds me to be more careful next time. The last time I allowed them through into this world, a lifelong friend moved too close to them and simply vanished. No dust, no remains, just gone. I firmly believe he is trapped somewhere between worlds, or at least his body is. I doubt if a human could survive in such a place.”

“What do they look like though ? Tell me ?” Asked Tesla.

Too loud, several heads turned their way. The waiter helped, returning to ask if they wished to order dessert. Nikola surprised himself, by ordering some apple pie, while Strauss chose a fruit tartlet.

“I do feel hungry today, it must be the excitement.” Said Nikola. “I apologise for the outburst, but please. As best you can, please describe these devils of the thunder ?”

“You may have come close to seeing them for yourself old friend, though I'm not sure if your eponymous coil generates the right type of light. I attended your last public demonstration and saw the shapes between the electrical flashes.”

“That ! That is nothing but a kind of miasma, caused by the electricity meeting the humid air, nothing more.” Said Nikola.

“What you call miasma, I call plasma old friend. Terms though, more conflict of dialect if you like. I see the plasma too, but not all the ragged shapes are so benign. I would avoid increasing the voltage any further. As to a description... How does one describe the indescribable ?”

“Carefully Strauss and with precision.”

His host laughed and they shared laughter for the first time. The arrival of dessert gave them a few moments relief from discussing dark matters.

“The closest description to the truth is creatures born out of electricity and light.” Said Strauss. “As if one of the lightning flashes from your coil, were to come alive and intensify itself. The Mayans were right to call them devils of the thunder.”

“You believe them to be sentient beings ?”

“Oh yes, see them move and you will believe that too. I swore never to bring them through into our world again.... But if you wish, I will show you these devils. There is risk involved though, two people who meant a lot to me, have already died during such experiments at my house.”

Nikola knew that Peter would hate it, but he simply had to see 'them,' the indescribable devils who Strauss had gone to such lengths to warn him about. Besides, it was obvious that Jules Strauss had a first class mind and there might be something to learn in his laboratory. Plasma indeed, sounded like something he wished to know more about.

"I will come to Bridgeport for a weekend." He said. "We must arrange it for as soon as possible. I will of course be bringing my manservant with me."

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Peter Kaplan had worked for Nikola Tesla for nearly two years and he was aware that their relationship must have looked strange to outsiders, perhaps even inappropriate. Even Peter's own mother had urged him to be careful, lest he be considered too friendly with such a man. Peter knew what she meant by such a man of course, quite a few of Tesla's associates believed he preferred the intimate company of men, rather than women. In truth his master didn't seem physically interested in men or women, though he did seem almost scared of the gentler sex. Work seemed to be his master's only vice and that looked likely to send him to an early grave. Two or three hours a night Tesla slept and that wasn't enough rest for such a hard worker. Not that Peter discussed Tesla's business with anyone, including his own family. He'd just had one brief conversation with his mother, to allay her fears.

"Mr Tesla is a gentleman, who seems put off by modern assertive women." He'd told her.

"Oh, I can quite understand that. Where will it end ? Women in trousers it'll be next."

After that his mother viewed his master in a new light and didn't worry about her son's good name. Peter wasn't that keen on weekends away though. Being manservant to a man who was never seen in female company was one thing, but weekends away were more likely to cause rumours. Peter had been out with women he didn't like that much and bedded a few ladies of easy virtue, after parading them about in the tavern he usually frequented. All to prove something to others of course, a weakness he seemed unable to shake off.

"He is a good man and I have learned so much." He muttered.

Knowing how to read and write had been a must to get the job, there had even been a test. Nikola was more like a friend than an employer though, encouraging him to read anything and everything there was in house and the lab. Peter had learned lots of long and unusual word, like asexual, which he had a pretty good idea was what his master was. Peter stopped placing folded shirts into a drawer in the travel trunk and went to the top of the stairs.

"Do you really need two dozen shirts for a weekend ?" He yelled down the stairs. "We'll need to hire a waggon to carry your weekend luggage."

"Nonsense, I've seen how much can be strapped to the roof of a carriage." Replied Tesla.

"Serious Nikola, there is just far too much, unless we hire a waggon. Or maybe one of the new internal combustion engine powered trucks."

"God forbid dear fellow, we want to arrive this year ! Damn contraptions scaring the public and needing to be repaired every half mile. We'll stick to horses Peter, far better."

It was an odd comment for a man at the leading edge of modern technology, but Peter had noticed that his master was a realist. Engine driven trucks did seem to spend a lot of their time by the side of the road, being fixed.

"You'll need to come up here and choose what you want to take, or we really will need a second carriage."

"Nonsense ! I'll be up there in a minute."

Peter waited for the clumping noise of feet on the stairs, Nikola seemed to run everywhere. His master seemed in a perpetual hurry to get somewhere.

"I do see the problem." Said Tesla.

It was impossible not to see the problem. Nikola had strewn clothing about his bedroom and left Peter to pack it into a trunk and one large leather bag. It was impossible, the proverbial quart into a pint glass. There was enough clothing to last the average person a six week vacation. Tesla muttered, as he looked at what was already in the trunk and what remained in various heaps.

"I will trust it to you Peter. Pack what you think I need, but stop once trunk and bag are full. I will need a few small pieces of equipment, but I will put them in bag I can carry."

"Good ! Do you need to go at all though ? Either this Strauss is a mad man or if the stories of strange creatures are true....."

"Then he is a very dangerous man my dear Peter. We all love danger, even if we never want to admit it. If I was to relieve you of any obligation to me, I bet you'd still come with me."

Peter gave a deep bow towards his master, though he was laughing as he did it.

"Where you go, I go also Nikola. Such is the nature of our relationship."

"I did once read the journal of Hugh Curwen, the famous Elizabethan occultist and exorcist. He always warned his clients when things were about to become dangerous. He offered everyone the chance to leave the room. Of course his client always remained, probably to make sure Curwen was earning his money. Wives seldom left and he remarked that servants had no real choice than to remain. You do have a choice Peter. I would like you there as a friend, but I won't force you."

"Are you now a believer in such things as exorcisms and the occult now ?" Asked Peter. "I thought you considered it all nonsense ?"

"There are many things I consider nonsense, until I am convinced otherwise. You didn't answer my question Peter.... Are you coming to Bridgeport with me in the morning."

"Of course I am. Now leave me to pack your trunk."

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Nikola had expected the house in Bridgeport to be large and neglected, with Strauss as the sole occupant. He was usually good at reading people, but he'd been wrong about Strauss living the life of a recluse, in a grubby house.

"Mr Tesla, you're expected, please come inside. Matt and the gardener will help your man move your luggage upstairs."

Joan as he was to learn later, though he was never officially introduced to the lady who obviously ran the house. Matt was manservant to Jules Strauss, who also acted as lab assistant when required. The gardener was never seen again, once the trunk had been manhandled up the stairs. A housekeeper, a manservant and a gardener indeed. Nikola was beginning to suspect that Strauss was wealthy, perhaps very wealthy. Science needed donors and his attitude towards his host for the weekend, was beginning to shift.

"My dear friend. Let Joan deal with getting your luggage to your room, you must be tired after the journey." Said Strauss.

The strange movement was more pronounced now, or he might have been noticing it more in the bright morning sunlight. Nikola followed, leaving four people to get his travel trunk upstairs. There was a little neglect as they walked through the house. Chipped paint, yellowing curtains and worn carpets. Nothing structural though, the huge old house looked free of damp and rather comfortable.

"Without Joan, the place would have become a ruin." Said Strauss. "She aired your room and a room for your man and lit fires in both. You should have a comfortable stay."

“Thank you, very thoughtful.”

Nikola wasn't sure if he'd ever want to have more staff than Peter, but he did have a smaller house and it was in a far better state of repair. As for a female housekeeper..... No, that would never happen. She'd just end up ordering him about in his own home.

“This is quite a library Strauss..... If only I had the space.” Said Nikola.

A long room with windows that looked out over a well-cared for garden. Three walls of the room were shelved from floor to ceiling, there had to be several thousand books on those shelves. Not only for show, several large tomes were out on tables, open to reveal drawings of machinery and scientific devices.

“I'm glad you like it.” Said Strauss. “A collection begun by my great, great grandfather, though I might have missed another great. Many are from the east and cover knowledge gained in that part of the world and lost again. I have tea, or I could find something stronger.”

“No, tea would be fine. May I ?” Indicating a book.

“Yes, consider my house as your own.”

It was impossible, but the design for a multiphase electric motor, was looking up at him from an ancient book. The binding looked old, as did the yellowing parchment. If it was a trick, it was a very good one.

“I can't read the language.” Said Nikola. “Is this from the east ?”

“Yes, from the area now known as the Karakum Desert and even I can only read a small amount of the language it is written in. Look at the page where I inserted a bookmark.”

The bookmark was made of leather, with the image of the devil painted on it. A depiction of the devil taking sinners to hell, in a handcart. Nikola chuckled, as he turned to the page. He stopped chuckling as he saw the etching which had been printed on the entire page.

“That is what we're in danger of unleashing, with experiments in high energy physics. Meet three six nine.” Said Strauss.

It looked like nothing living he'd ever seen, yet the artist had tried to convey a feeling of movement and perhaps even malice. Ball lighting with hundreds of long grasping tentacles. No eyes, no mouth, yet the picture showed a living creature of some kind, of that he was certain. Big too, there was the outline of a man in the drawing to give the image some scale. The creature of lightning bolts, was the size of man.

“You never mentioned having this image of the creatures.” Said Nikola.

“A book from a mystery vanished race, in a language no one properly understands. You'd have thought me insane and never come here.”

“Perhaps you're right. Why three six nine ?”

“They had a complex language and I pity their poor young, as they tried to learn it. Numbers have meaning as well as being numbers, though you have to know the context to understand the meaning. Some of their letters are phonetic, while others are pictograms. Hellishly complex and many pages in the book are as yet, unreadable to me. I do understand the meaning of three six nine though. Three is something unstoppable, a kind of nemesis. Six means evil or of an evil place.”

“Like six six six in the bible.” Said Nikola.

“Yes, I'm certain that comes from the same source, perhaps all of numerology.”

“And the nine, what does that mean ?”

“Thunder, which gives us a nemesis evil thunder, though we'd probably order the words differently.”

“Evil Thunder Nemesis.” Said Nikola.

“Exactly old friend, which is why we need to be very careful with our experiments. I dread to think what one of these creature could do, if set free in our world.”

Nikola felt almost bewitched by the book he couldn't read. Every few pages there were etchings of machinery that looked years ahead of anything he'd patented. The materials being used looked better than steel too, vast pieces of machinery held up by thin arcs of metal.

“I am something of a linguist Jules. Could I borrow this book for a while ?”

“Alas no, though you may look at it here and take notes if you wish.”

“But I can't borrow it, even for a short period of time ?”

Poor Jules, he did look mortified at having to refuse him.

“No, there is a history behind my owning this book. An Arab occultist, driven half mad by thirst, starvation and something less clearly defined, carried this book out of the Karakum Desert. He made it to Kyzyl-Su on the shores of The Caspian Sea, before dying. My great-great grandfather was there at the time and the mad Arab was slightly known to him. He was given the book by the man, though with his dying words, the dying occultist extracted a promise that my family would keep the book safe forever. Melodramatic I know, but I feel obligated to keep that promise.”

“Of course I quite understand.” Said Tesla. “I will take some notes and do my best to draw some of the devices in my journal.”

“Good I'd hate us to fall out over the matter, though I do have a question that is important, but might seem impertinent.”

“Ask away Jules, ask away. I promise not be offended.”

“I intended to start the experiment tonight, but my man saw what happened to the others who helped me, the..... Fatalities. Matt is now even skittish about entering the laboratory. Perhaps if you trust your man, he might help. We really need a third, but only if you feel he can be trusted to be discreet ?”

“I would trust Peter with my life. He has never told anyone my personal business, which is probably why he has lasted in the job. I have had a few bad experiences with manservants. I give you my word, Peter can be trusted.

“Good, then we'll begin after dinner.”

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Peter Kaplan had rested before being well fed. Venison, the same meal as the master of the house and Tesla were eating, though no wines were provided for the staff. He'd eaten in the kitchen, made to feel welcome by the staff of the house. After the meal the housekeeper had informed him that Mr Tesla wished to see him in the library. The house was huge and he only had a general idea where the library was. He became lost several times, before entering the room full of books. It was lit by electricity, which was still considered a marvel by most.

“Strauss actually has his own generator in an outhouse.” Said Nikola. “How are you settling in ?”

“Good, the staff are friendly and I've eaten well.”

Nikola had his most serious look on his face, trouble was about to arrive, he knew it.

“We need a third for the experiment Peter, another pair of strong arms, linked to a decent brain. I was hoping you might be up for it ?”

“Yes, of course.”

“There have been fatalities in this house Peter, and some serious injuries. You have to know the risks, before committing yourself.”

“If you're there, I will be there.” Said Peter.

“Very noble and appreciated, but Jules insisted that both if us need to see the injuries he suffered during his last experiment. I haven’t seen the wounds yet, but I believe them to be quite grievous.”

“I’ve seen things Nikola.” Said Peter. “When I was only twelve, I saw a drunk get his head caved in during a brawl. I’m not squeamish and I’m not a coward.”

“I am sure you’re not, but you should see what Jules has to show us, before agreeing to help us tonight. There is no shame in refusing and I’ll think no less of you.”

“I will help you, no matter what he may show us.”

A few minutes later Jules Strauss entered the room, dressed only in slippers and a thick bathrobe. He beckoned them over to the roaring fire at one end of the room.

“Sorry if you’re too hot.” Said Strauss. “I tend to feel the cold and forget that others might not share my love of keeping the house so hot. I will need to be naked to show you the wound, which stretches round my side and across my back.”

“You really don’t need to do this.” Said Nikola.

“I do, so that you really appreciate the risks, the need to be careful. I only survived because a famed surgeon was staying with someone nearby. I passed out quite quickly, expecting never to wake up again. The merest touch from one of these creatures and..... Well you are about to see. I told the surgeon that it had been an accident with a highly corrosive material. He had to use pins to repair vertebrae and removed three ribs entirely. Still, I can walk and I survived the pain.”

Strauss didn’t pull his robe to one side. He undid the belt, letting the robe fall to the floor. Peter heard Nikola gasp in horror at what they were both looking at.

“Look at me well, you may even touch if you wish.” Said Strauss. “But once I get dressed, we will never talk about my wound again.”

Peter had no intention of touching, or going anywhere the discoloured dent in the man’s side.

Strauss turned slightly and he gasped at the same time as Nikola.

“It’s as though you were held against an open furnace door.” Said Nikola

“The pain was agonising and I passed out for some time.”

Skin the colour of cured leather, stitched together by an expert hand. The terrible wound went right up their host’s back, crossing his spine. It looked as though something had taken a bite out of him and then cauterised the ghastly wound.

“I know some anatomy.” Said Tesla. “My God man, it’s a miracle you’re still alive.”

“I am aware of that, though I thought you didn’t believe in the almighty ?”

“Nor do I Jules, just a figure of speech.... Though your survival begins to make me believe in miracles.”

Straus was shivering, as he picked up his bathrobe and wrapped it round himself.

“Well, you’ve seen the consequences of not showing due care with these monsters.” He said. “Will you enter my laboratory and see these creatures with your own eyes ?”

“I will.” Said Nikola.

All eyes on him now, as Peter smiled at Tesla.

“Of course I’ll be there. Where you go, there I go also.”

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Nikola hadn’t really known what to expect, as Strauss unlocked the double set of heavy doors, which gave access to the laboratory. A good third of the house was the other side of those doors and some of it was technology created by reverse engineering devices in the ancient book the mad Arab had carried out of the Karakum desert. Nikola was nervous, but his curiosity outweighed any fear.

“Welcome to my laboratory.” Said Strauss.

Some rooms had been left on the periphery, but most of the rear third of the house had been gutted, to form a large open space, as large as the palm house at Kew Gardens, maybe larger. Benches everywhere covered in metal objects being created or repaired.

"This is truly amazing." Said Nikola. "My own lab is nothing compared to this."

He wanted to ask Strauss how he could afford to construct such a space for his scientific research, but good manners kept him from asking the question. The lattice work of steel girders, to keep the entire place from falling down, was a miracle of construction. In the centre of the laboratory, was a rotating device, which captured his attention. Tons of metal hung on thin supports made of a silver metal he didn't recognise. The whole contraption was slowly spinning around a central core.

"I see you like my generator, or ghūere as it's called in the book, though I have no real idea what that word means. I tell everyone we have a steam powered generator in an outhouse. This is my real generator though and it gives me enough power for all my experiments, without speeding up from the lazy pace you're seeing."

Nikola walked right under the rotating arms of the generator, amazed at what Strauss had created, by building the device from drawings in a book.

"What powers it?" Asked Nikola.

"Itself, though I'm not claiming to have created perpetual motion. I used an acid jar battery to collect the charge from a Wimshurst machine. That charge set the generator in motion and that is the only outside power it has ever had."

"Utter nonsense Strauss!" Snapped Tesla. "I'm not a fool and nature doesn't provide anything for nothing."

"My thoughts entirely me dear friend." Said Strauss. "I did have my suspicions about how it worked, after noting the unnecessary weight of certain components. After it had been running for a year, I halted the device and took it apart. I weighed all the components and there was a loss of mass. Only a few fractions of an ounce, but I was very thorough with my initial measurements and weights. The device is using a form of mass conversion, to create motive power. It then turns that momentum directly into electrical energy."

"And you built it all this from just a few drawings in a book?" Asked Peter.

Strauss looked pleased that his skill had been appreciated, walking up and stroking one of the thin support struts.

"Yes, though it wasn't easy. I created an alloy out of chrome and aluminium, which was far too brittle at the first try. The generator broke its supports and destroyed much of the lab. The second try at creating the alloy was successful.

"This must have all cost a small fortune?" Asked Peter. "No, a large fortune."

Well done Peter, for voicing a question his own good manners, forbade him asking.

"I will gladly tell you about the origins of my wealth." Said Strauss. "Not today though.... Gentlemen, we have an experiment to perform, a doorway to open to....perhaps other dimensions."

Strauss walked past the generator and towards the back of the laboratory, stopping next to a bench, on top of which was a machine about three feet square. It looked unimpressive after the generator, though Strauss touched the device very carefully. The casing looked to have been constructed out of pure gold and the device was bolted to a metal turntable.

"No matter what..... Only I touch the device." Said Strauss. "Is that understood?"

"Yes." Said Peter.

"Of course Jules, your lab, your rules." Said Nikola.

"Just remember the risks gentlemen and carry out my instructions exactly."

Strauss placed three fingers onto the device at once, as if pressing areas that were in some way significant. Nikola tried to see if Strauss was pushing buttons, but everything seemed to be intricately carved gold. The device began to light up, beams of light exiting from holes on top, to light up the ceiling above their heads.

“Now we need to shift the generator over to producing light instead of electrical energy.” Said Strauss. “No risk apart from pulled muscles, so we will need Peter and his strength. First though, we need to light a few oil lamps, for when the generator switches over. Poor Joan is used to lighting the house with lamps, when the mad professor is in his laboratory.”

Strauss laughed and they laughed with him, as they lit several large oil lamps, hanging from hooks on the walls. Back to the generator, with Strauss pointing at a large metal handle, attached to a plate below the rotating device.

“The handle needs to go as far to the right as it will go. I think they had motors to do this, but we must complete the task with brute force alone.”

It was hard work and there was a second heavy plate to move. As that clicked home, the electrical lighting went off, leaving them in just the dull yellow glow from the oil lamps.

“Any second now.” Said Strauss.

A thin beam of bright light, left the core of the generator and entered the gold box on the bench, through a hole on the side.

“I kept aligning it slightly wrong.” Said Strauss. “Hence the need for a turntable. Now it is aligned perfectly, the turntable locked in place.”

The light was so white, so bright. Nikola put his hand out, to run his fingers through the light.

“No !” Yelled Strauss. “You’ll lose your fingers, maybe your entire hand. The light is stimulated and intensified. That beam will cut through hardened steel.”

Back at the golden box, though Strauss still seemed reluctant to begin the experiment.

“First a little explanation of how I think this device works.” He said. “The Mayan’s were clever people and they realised that something lurked inside light. Creatures there all the time, perhaps thousands of them, harmlessly locked up in all those beams of light. I believe that dancing around ceremonial fires and leaping through flames, is race memory of Mayan’s cleansing themselves of their devils of the thunder. I sincerely believe they experimented when the conditions were right and a thunderstorm coincided with one of their holy rituals. Sometimes their experiments worked too well and many were killed or maimed.”

“How could they perform experiments ?” Asked Nikola. “They had no technology.”

“We are talking about experimenting with the esoteric rather than the technological.” Said Strauss.

“Yes Nikola my old friend, I am talking about the occult, which I know you don’t believe in. I am hoping to convince you tonight, that there is more to the universe, than your technology can show you.”

“What does the golden box do ?” Asked Nikola.

“You ask me, as though I designed it.” Answered Strauss. “As far as I can tell, it changes the beam of light, which I am about to aim across the far end of the lab. The change allows us to see them, but also allows them to see us. My best guess and it is only a guess, is that the box strips something from the light beam, like peeling back the insulation on an electrical cable. First though, you both need to step well back, right against the wall behind you.”

Nikola moved back, eager to finally seem ‘them,’ the mysterious devils of the thunder. Strauss was fiddling with something, which looked like a clockwork timer.

“Don’t move any closer when they appear, their reach is surprisingly long.” Said Strauss. “I was caught by just a brief touch, when coming back to turn off the device. Now I’ve added a simple clockwork timer, set for two minutes. Right, it’s done, keep back !”

Strauss moved the timer and did his best attempt at a run, quickly joining them against the wall. Almost instantly a thick beam of light, crossed the laboratory, hitting the wall furthest from them. “I can’t see them.” Said Nikola.

“Patience, patience old friend. Do not move closer, no matter what happens.”

It was if the beam of light suddenly grew filaments of brighter light. Tentacles, much like the flares of electrical energy, created by his own Tesla Coil. There was something about the movement of these filaments though, something which hinted at an intelligence behind them.

“They’re growing, trying to break out.” Said Peter.

“Easy lad, they can’t reach us if we stay here.” Said Strauss.

Had he said the same to those who had died in that same laboratory ? Nikola pushed himself hard against the wall and watched the filaments of light grow larger, longer and much brighter.

“They have a core, a central body.” Said Strauss. “That will appear next.”

Blinding light, as a ball of light appeared at the centre of each waving set of filaments. That was the danger Nikola realised. The dazzle from the sheer brightness of the core, meant it was impossible to watch every tendril. One stretched towards him, before moving round and passing through a workbench. There was a sound now too, like being close to Niagara Falls.

“Dear God, if they were to break free.” Yelled Peter.

No good trying to answer him, the roaring sound was deafening. The tendrils were lashing everything, stopping just a few feet from where they stood. Doing little damage though, apart from a few scorch marks and igniting any loose papers left lying around. There was a large plant in a stone tub in the far window, a tree really, a good fifteen feet tall and bushy. One of the tendrils touched the stem of the plant and it turned to dry dust in an instant. All of it, from stem to the highest leaf, became ash almost instantaneously.

“Did you see that ?” Shouted Strauss. “Living tissue seems to fascinate them.”

Suddenly the noise and the blinding light were gone, leaving them once again with just the dull yellow glow of the oil lamps. The sudden change was shocking.

“What happened ?” Asked Peter.

“Nothing to worry about, the timer reached two minutes and turned off the device.” Said Strauss.

“You may now move around as you please. Careful though, some metals keep a residual heat from their tendrils.”

“Please Jules, turn it on again.” Said Nikola. “I need to see more, if I am to understand them.”

“No, maybe tomorrow.” Said Strauss. “They learn you see and they’re clever. If they were to use a concerted attack against the timer..... No, far too dangerous to turn the device on again today.”

Nikola walked over to the gold box, holding his hand a respectful distance from it, but feeling no heat on the back of his hand. He touched it carefully, feeling some heat, but not enough to burn.

“Can this device fully release the creatures from the light ?” He asked.

“There is one setting, which I believe can do that, though it would be suicide for us and probably cause the death of millions.” Answered Strauss. “I feel the need for some Earl Grey and biscuits Nikola. We can discuss the device over refreshments.”

Nikola didn’t want to move, an idea had lodged itself in his mind, after seeing the plant turned to dust.

“Your help is needed, if we are to have electric light back in the house.” Called Strauss.

“Sorry, of course. My thoughts were miles away.”

More sweat and straining of muscles, to return the generator to producing electrical energy. Strauss extinguished the oil lamps and they were heading towards the laboratory doors, when Nikola decided to voice his thoughts.

“You do realise what your gold box is don’t you ?” He asked.

“I’d be grateful to hear your theories old friend, but in comfort.” Said Strauss. “I fear that I’m getting too old for moving heavy machinery, every muscle seems to ache.”

Nikola didn’t move, couldn’t move. The sudden realisation of what the box was designed to be, held him fixed to the spot.

“It is the thing every military leader has ever wanted, something I’ve been trying to develop myself. It is a death ray Strauss. Why else would they have built such a device ?”

Strauss understood, he could tell from his expression.

“You’re right, of course you’re right.” Said Strauss. “That is why it was so dangerous to use, it was supposed to be dangerous. What a fool I’ve been. I’ll destroy the device, dismantle it and burn the plans.”

“Don’t be hasty; such a device will open certain doors.” Said Tesla. “The military have deep pockets and.....”

“Monstrous !” Yelled Strauss. “I would never give the military such a device. It will be destroyed, even the diagrams in the old book will be burned.”

Nikola could see the money as though it was already his. Enough funding to own a laboratory as good as the one they were stood in, perhaps even better.

“Think of the American soldiers saved from dying in battle Jules.” He said. “Give the generals a small demonstration and they’d give us more money than we’d ever need.”

“Us ? You’re proposing a partnership ?”

“Of course I am. With your knowledge of the old texts and my expertise, we could....”

“Out of my house Tesla, I now see you for what you are. Carpetbagger and warmonger, out to line your own pockets, no matter what the cost in death and destruction. I’ll arrange for a carriage outside my house after breakfast and you will be leaving in it.”

“But.... If you’ll just let me explain.....”

“Out of my house after breakfast, or I will have you removed.”

Strauss was gone, through the double doors and beyond earshot and any further conversation.

“What do we do now ?” Asked Peter.

“We pack up our things and go Peter, there is nothing else we can do.”

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Jules Strauss knew Tesla had taken the book the next morning. Proving it was quite another thing though and Tesla was treating him like a problem stalker again. All mail returned unopened and a threat to call the police when he’d attempted to enter the laboratory on South Fifth Avenue. Two rather rough types were manning the lab’s reception desk now and they’d obviously been told to treat him as a threat.

“Mr Tesla would prefer not to involve the police.” They’d told him. “Why not go home sir and leave Mr Tesla to go about his business.”

Involve the police indeed, Tesla was the thief. Not that he wanted to involve the police, they probably wouldn’t believe him. Tesla was a man with certain amount of fame attached to his name, whilst Jules was just someone with a history of sending a large number of letters to Nikola Tesla. Plus if by some chance the police did take him seriously and raid the lab. Did he really want the book

becoming public, an exhibit in a prosecution for theft ? No, the only way was to wait and use his wealth to fight Tesla, hiring people to watch his adversary and bribing Tesla's own men to supply information. That was how he saw Tesla now, an adversary who had to be stopped. A man who unwittingly, might destroy mankind with his desire to be famous. The ego of the man !

"Ezra Newton is here to see you." Said Joan.

"Good, bring him through."

Her expression told of her dislike of Ezra, who had been given the task of hiring and controlling a small group of well-paid men. If Ezra was the man's real name ? He'd been recommended by someone Jules knew in the military. Some said Newton was an agent for the British, while some said he was in the employ of the French. His own contact had told him Ezra was an American spy and a damned good one. The truth was irrelevant to Jules. The man was efficient, knew his business and best of all, kept his mouth shut. Ezra limped into the library, the man appeared to have picked up a few war wounds on his travels. Dark hair above a nondescript face, which was always partially covered by a cloth cap. Ezra was the ordinary looking guy in the crowd, who no one could properly describe.

"How are things progressing in South Fifth Avenue ?" Asked Jules.

"It is happening tonight."

"He built it that fast ? Last week you said he was still some way off completion."

"He was then. He's spent everything he had and borrowed more. Tesla has ruined himself to build this thing."

This thing, the usual way for the untrained mind to view most modern technology. It seemed that Tesla was gambling everything to build a device to demonstrate to the generals. A few short months to build something which had taken him years. He had to grudgingly admit that Nikola Tesla had to be a genius.

"You're certain he means to test it tonight ?" Asked Jules.

"Yes, he's sent everyone apart from Peter Kaplan away. It appears he wants to run up some sort of device in private."

"Good, good. Then it appears we are going to New York tonight. Are you armed ?"

Ezra nodded at him and opened his coat enough to reveal the handle of a pistol, jammed into his belt. The man probably had more weapons hidden in his clothing. They might have to commit murder that night and Jules could think of no one better than Ezra Newton to take with him on such a terrible task.

"I will get myself into the building and up to the 4th floor as best I can." Said Jules. "Your one and only task is to get the bag on the table up there with me. Without the device in the bag, Tesla might succeed with his monstrous plan."

Not that Ezra knew or cared what Tesla was doing. Part of the man's value rested in his apparent lack of curiosity and never asking pointless questions.

"Is the device in the bag fragile ?" Asked Newton.

"Not particularly, just heavy."

Ezra picked up the bag, feeling the weight, before throwing it over his shoulder. He adjusted his stance to a slight stoop, but seemed to have no trouble in carrying the device.

"I wouldn't like to have to run with it on my back." Said Newton. "I'll get it up to the lab on the 4th floor for you though, no problem. When do we leave ?"

"As soon as I have armed myself and put on a coat. I assume you have a carriage waiting outside ?"

"Yes and there are two men inside it, waiting for your orders."

“No Ezra, this is going to be just you and me tonight, we’ll drop the men off once we’re in New York.”

“As you wish..... And if Tesla and his man put up a fight ?”

“We kill them.”

Ezra Newton merely nodded at him. He liked the man’s taciturn nature, even if it troubled him slightly. There were two pistols on a table, on top of his outdoor coat. Ezra helped him place the guns in comfortable places, or as comfortable as two pounds of steel can ever be, once it is jammed up against the skin. Bag over his shoulder, Ezra followed him out to the carriage.

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The carriage was going to wait for them a block away from the laboratory, in case they had to flee a murder scene. 33-35 South Fifth Avenue was all in darkness, apart from the windows on the 4th floor. There was light up there, though most of it was being stopped by curtains.

“He’s beginning.” Said Jules. “Let no one stop us Ezra. The lives of everyone in New York are in our hands tonight.”

He could have gone further and said the entire planet was at risk, but didn’t want Newton to consider him a madman. Not now, not at this late stage. He couldn’t risk losing the trust and aid of the only man with him. Tempting to use the electrically powered elevator which Tesla had installed, but it far too easy to stop or jam, trapping them inside. Four floors of feet tramping up concrete steps was going to be a long haul for both of them.

“At least your informant was right about Tesla sending the guards away.” Said Jules.

“They were paid enough to be reliable.”

No idea who rented the lower floors, all the entry doors were locked, some chained. Jules had no real curiosity about such matter anyway, all his energy being used to climb the never ending sets of stairs. Something was nagging at his mind though, demanding attention. Tesla was short of money, he was likely to have taken short cuts and avoided using gold. He had skills of course in transferring diagrams into the reality of finished devices. He couldn’t read the words in the book though and would have no idea why gold was crucial to the design and why the light beam needed to be aimed at solid stone walls. Jules felt his heart beat faster, sweat forming on his brow. Just suppose Tesla had cut far too many corners !?

“We must hurry.” He said.

Ezra smiled, he was the one constantly waiting for Jules to catch up. They were in sight of the final set of double doors, the ones leading to the 4th floor. Jules was breathing hard and badly in need of a rest. The doors to the 4th floor flew open, a bright light coming out to illuminate the entire staircase, brighter than any daylight. For a world still used to living by gas light or oil lamps, the effect was dazzling and terrifying.

“He has activated the device.” Said Jules. “Pray we are not too late.”

Jules carried on, hoping Ezra was still behind him. The man seemed loyal, but how far would he go for cold hard cash. It must have seemed as though they were about to enter hell itself. Jules shielded his eyes from the light and walked into the 4th floor laboratory. Noise as well as blinding light, the roar was far louder than it had been in his own lab. Jules leant towards Ezra, shouting close to his ear.

“Walk where I walk, there is unseen danger in this place.”

Ezra nodded and drew a heavy pistol out of his belt. Jules hoped it wasn’t required, but Tesla’s device had to be destroyed, the plans burned. The first thing Jules noticed was that Tesla had used steel instead of gold..... ‘They’ could move through iron and steel, but not gold. The generator was a

pale imitation of the one he'd so lovingly created, the device covered in useless steel. Worst of all was where Tesla had aimed the light beam. He walked to within a few feet of Tesla, shouting the same thing at him, over and over again. Finally Tesla seemed to see and hear him.

"What was that?"

"I said, you aimed the beam at the floor."

"Yes."

"The beam can pass through wood, even the concrete. Only a thick wall of granite is guaranteed to stop it. You may have released the thunder devils into the lower floors."

"I had no idea, I....."

"Of course you didn't." Said Jules. "That is why you should never have built the device. They can travel through steel Nikola....."

Tesla looked horror struck and was reaching for the lever to stop the device, as they heard a scream.

"Oh no, not Peter. Run Peter, over here." Yelled Tesla.

"What are those things?" Yelled Ezra.

Still trapped in the beam, the creatures had found Peter, their long filaments of light, feeling for him.

It was as though they were blind, using their tendrils to find living tissue. One had already tasted Peter, his right arm was gone below the elbow. No blood, the wounds 'they' created, were cauterised as if by intense heat. Peter was caught in a recess in the wall and he was screaming.

"Turn it off Tesla..... Now !" Shouted Jules.

Ezra had his gun up and for one awful moment it looked like he might shoot Tesla. He didn't, the room was plunged into darkness, the instant Tesla turned off the device. Not that it helped poor Peter. The last thing they all saw, by the dying light from the device, was a tendril running over Peter's head, turning it instantly to dry ash.

"No..... No..... Not Peter ! They can't have Peter." Screamed Tesla.

No quite total darkness, there was a slight glow from just one oil lamp, which Tesla must have lit in case it was needed. Ezra still looked confused, but he was putting his gun away and trying to get Tesla to his feet.

"The man I think he loved in his own way, just died in front of him." Said Jules. "He'll be no use to us now. Get him to the stairs, while I set the device you carried all the way up here."

"Can you lift it?"

"I'll manage. Just get Tesla out and begin to go down the stairs. We may not have long once I turn the generator on again."

Ezra didn't need much persuading after all he'd seen that night. He had a crying Tesla up off the floor, almost carrying the grieving man towards the doors.

"Please work." Muttered Jules.

The device in the bag, heavy because of the gold shielding. They hated gold, it was a medium they couldn't penetrate. He lifted the device up, slotting it into the generator Tesla had built. A limiter of a sorts, which he'd built but never had the need to test. If he was right and that was a big if, the device would turn the generator in on itself, creating a massive implosion. The device, the lab, Peter's dead body..... All of it would be crushed down and destroyed, before finally the entire four floors of the building, would collapse into the basement. With luck, Tesla's plans for the death ray, would be destroyed too. Jules turned on the generator, creating a glow bright enough to see his precious book from the Karakum desert, lying next to what was left of Peter.

"My book." He muttered.

Risky, he had no exact idea how long the device needed to build up. He also wasn't sure if it would kill all of the creatures, who might have been released into the lower floors. He hoped they'd be destroyed, much as he hoped to have enough time to grab his priceless book and escape. Hope wasn't much to rely on; it was just all he had. Jules decided the book was worth the risk.

"Oh, poor Peter.... I hope you get a decent burial."

The creature's tendrils had removed part of an arm and his head and neck, but the rest of his body was lying there, quite close to the book. Jules did his best not to look, but his head moved that way, as he picked up the heavy tome. It might not have been so bad, if Peter hadn't been a guest in his house for a day. Jules vomited over the floor, which actually made him feel better.

"Come on !" Shouted Ezra from the doorway.

"Quiet, you might attract one of them."

Jules had no real idea how the creatures saw the world, how their senses worked. They might hear movement, or simply rely on another sense he couldn't comprehend. It just seemed sensible to make as little noise as possible. The device he'd set running, began to make a high pitched whining noise, his cue to leave. He'd covered half the distance to the door, before a tendril rose through the floor, searching, feeling along the ground.

"Run you fool !" Shouted Ezra.

Jules ran his finger over his lips, hoping Ezra understood the hint. He seemed to, miming silently that Jules should move back and cross the lab in a different place. All the time the device was getting louder. The floor began to vibrate as he attempted to silently cross the lab, behind a panel of electrical equipment. The tendril seemed confused by the vibration, continuing to search where he'd been standing. Jules reached the stairs and whispered to Ezra.

"Can you carry Tesla on your own ?"

"Yes, for a tall man he seems to weigh very little."

Tesla wasn't physically injured, but the horrific death of Peter, had rendered him unable to even walk. He seemed to be suffering from some kind of mental breakdown. Jules found it hard to find any pity for him. Jules led, taking the stairs as fast as his wounded spine would allow. As they passed the doors leading to the 3rd floor, the vibration intensified.

"The device will begin its work of destruction very soon." Said Jules.

As they passed the 2nd floor, a tendril of light reached out and might have caught Jules, if Ezra hadn't shouted out to warn him. Worrying about the device about to implode the entire building, had driven all thought of the creatures from his mind.

"They're free Ezra..... Let's hope the device destroys them all."

Poor Ezra, no one had answered his first question, asking what 'they' were. If the device worked and if they survived, he'd tell him and risk being considered a crazy man. The next landing appeared to be on fire, flames coming out of the 1st floor, to engulf the stairs.

"There is a dressmakers on that floor, lots of cloth to fuel the inferno. The same people use the basement to store bales of cloth." Said Ezra.

Of course he'd know, he'd probably spent quite some time investigating every tenant in the building. There was no other way down, they'd have to risk running past the inferno. Jules began to run, just as the device picked that moment to destroy the entire 4th floor.

"Keep going, we have to get out of the building." Jules shouted.

Panic began to set in, the fear of being buried under tons of rubble. Jules found his back would let him run, if the motivation was strong enough. He felt injured bones complaining and knew he'd suffer weeks of pain, if he survived.

“Run ! Run !” He kept shouting.

Hoping Ezra was behind him, still carrying Tesla over his shoulder. They ignored the flames licking at their clothing and carried on running, out of the building’s main doors and further, right out into the street. They were alone, no one had come out yet to investigate the noise and destruction in South Fifth Avenue.

“Christ ! That was close.” Said Ezra.

The ground began to shake as though an earthquake was happening in New York. The entire building in front of them collapsed in on itself, as walls, floors and everything else, was imploded and rammed down in the basement. At least two creatures of light looked to have been drawn down there too, though there was no way of knowing if all of them had been destroyed. Lastly came intense flames, as if some almighty power was wiping the place clean. The fire wasn’t quite the last thing, that was the dust. A vast cloud of dust came down out of the air, covering them, making them all cough.

“We should go..... Someone will come to investigate.” Said Ezra.

Indeed they were certain to. It might take a while, but officialdom in its many guises was sure to arrive soon, to begin investigating what had happened to 33-35 South Fifth Avenue.

“Do we take Tesla with us ?”

“No. Put him down.” Answered Jules.

Jules did briefly consider shooting Tesla, several shots to be certain of killing him and ending the madness forever.

“Do you have a notebook and pencil ?” He asked Ezra.

Of course he had, tools of the trade for a good investigator or spy. Jules wrote a quick note, jamming it into Tesla’s pocket. The poor man didn’t seem to notice, or even be aware of where they were about to leave him.

“Now...we should go and find our carriage.” Said Jules.

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Officially the garment store in the basement had been the source of the blaze, which destroyed the entire building at 33-35 South Fifth Avenue. Officially there had been no fatalities. Peter’s body had vanished in the implosion, which had taken most of the building with it. Tesla knew the truth though and it broke him. He had other triumphs after that night, but his mind never fully recovered. He drifted from hotel to hotel in New York, running up bills he couldn’t pay.

There were his famous birthday press conferences of course, where he boasted about having a working death ray. No one took him seriously though and no one was ever allowed to see the note Jules Strauss had jammed into his pocket.

‘Let this madness end with the death of Peter.

- Jules.’

One simple line, which had stopped him carrying out any further work on the device, or the generator. The invention of a lifetime, the generator was the secret to clean and inexhaustible energy. The threat was too high though.... Jules was right, the madness had to end.

He did have his own copy of the plans of course, inside a locked box in his rooms. As his health began to fail he removed the plans and burned them, in memory of Peter Kaplan.

The madness had to end..... Tesla placed a piece of random equipment in the box labelled ‘death ray’, wondering what those who found it would think of him.

“They’ll just think I was the archetypal mad scientist.”

~ ~

~The End~

“If you only knew the magnificence of the 3, 6 and 9, then you would have the key to the universe.”

— Nikola Tesla

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