

Tesla Electric

by David G. Fraser

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David Gustav Fraser
42 Coolmine Road
Toronto M6J 3E9
fax/tel 416-533-9996
dgfraser@interlog.com

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Characters

Tesla_____the genius

Edison_____the inventor

Larson_____Edison's assistant

Hewitt / Abby_____another assistant

Twain_____the writer

Duel_____patent office commissioner

Morgan_____the banker

Willy_____the boy

(N.B. Doubling reduces the required number of actors to 5.)

New York City. 100 years ago.

TESLA: I can send my electricity 100's of miles with no loss of strength. AC doesn't actually move , it switches polarity, so fast it makes your motor spin.

EDISON: You're talking about running lightning through the streets! At frequencies that high, electricity is a wild animal. Far too much power is involved. If anyone tries to do it, he should be locked up! I'd see to it!

TESLA: I've succeeded.

EDISON: Balls! Pardon me, I'm a little indelicate. I talk that way when I haven't slept for 3 days, and someone takes me for a schoolboy. I've conducted a few experiments with this crazy stuff myself. Before you got here, I went to the funeral of a lab assistant. I'm not proud of that.

TESLA: You are mistaken.

EDISON: I'm what -- ?

TESLA: Fundamentally.

EDISON: Who do you think you -- ? Is the mother of that child mistaken?

TESLA: Change is painful. There is no need to appeal to the lower emotions.

EDISON: Lower emotions! (looks around) Do you believe this...?

TESLA: Archimedes said: he who --

EDISON: Archimedes said a lotta hee-hoo! What do we call these things?

HEWITT: Light... apples?

EDISON: No!

LARSON: Light... turnips!

EDISON: No!

HEWITT: Light-bulbs?

EDISON: What? Speak up -- !

HEWITT: Bub-bulbs, Mr Edison...?

LARSON: (scorn) Light-bulbs... I call them crysticles!

EDISON: I like it...!

LARSON: (triumphant) Crysticles...!

EDISON: I like it. The DC light-bubble! That'll keep us busy for a few weeks --

TESLA: I know the mind of the Wizard of Menlo Park.

EDISON: Oh, he's gonna read my mind...!

TESLA: Chapter one: you invent something. Chapter two: you like it. Chapter three: you refuse to see anything else!

EDISON: And that, my friend, is the recipe of a best seller!

TESLA: We can light up the sky, deprive the night of its terrors! We can draw unlimited quantities of water from the ocean for irrigation! We can fertilize the soil and draw energy from the sun. Effects of cosmic magnitude can be created. And very soon we will finish our work, and usher in a golden age!

EDISON: Do you get these ideas from a crystal ball?

TESLA: This is awkward. I gather I'm not making myself understood.

EDISON: And I gather I'm speaking Swahili!

TESLA: It might be better if you just settle up and pay me the \$50,000. Obviously, I can't prove what I say unless I build the machines.

EDISON: (puzzled) 50,000...?

TESLA: You said, I recall, that if I could "do it", there would be 50,000 "in it". So, if you don't mind... a cheque will do.

EDISON: (laugh) You've got a lot to learn about the American sense of humour! You do have a sense of humour, don't you...?

TESLA: It doesn't necessarily come when it's called.

EDISON: You're full of dreams, son. Nothing a little hard work won't fix.

TESLA: My work --

EDISON: It's fine by me if you play with yourself on your own time. But not in my laboratory, is that clear? I'll raise you to 18 dollars a week. That's more than I pay these clowns.

LARSON and HEWITT are very upset by that crack.

TESLA: Clowns make \$20 a week! At that rate, it will take you 50 years and 6 months to pay me the \$50,000 you promised. You insist on proof. I have no choice but to go elsewhere to fund my work. I do so with regret.

EDISON: I'm sure. Tsk -- I'm disappointed. You're a good wire-man. But don't play in the streets with your electrical storms, Mr Tesla. Leave your keys.

TESLA surrenders his keys, starts to leave.

TESLA: America is still out there isn't it...?

EDISON: You know who you remind me of? The North American Indian.

TESLA: I respect and admire your work, but the truth is, you're no longer at the forefront. Will any of you come with me? Into the future? Or will you remain here, in the fading twilight...?

TESLA waits, then bows, exits. EDISON yells after him
--

EDISON: I have a riddle for you! How many geniuses does it take to screw in a light-bubble -- ! (disgust) "Twilight" -
- I'll "twilight" you, you -- !

HEWITT: Mr Edison...? (waits) Boss...?

EDISON: What -- !

HEWITT: Is it possible ... that he's right?

EDISON: Anything is possible. But not AC. Electricity is like water flowing through a pipe. It doesn't make sense to have it run back and forth, the plumbing doesn't make sense. You with me? It's like you -- you can't be a boy and girl at

the same time. (he pats HEWITT's chest, realizes that something is amiss, but doesn't comment) The plumbing just... isn't.... Every instinct I got tells me that man is dangerously wrong! Anyone want to go rattle bones and read crystal balls in Europe? Go right ahead.

Edison laughs, the laughs become tears, and Larson comforts him

EDISON: I'm doomed, aren't I. It's all soon going to come crashing down. Isn't it. My whole life's work -- DC: Dead & Clobbered. I am 38 years old, Mr Larson. I have been building my DC empire for over 20 years -- and now...?

LARSON: Applesauce, Boss.

EDISON: Eh? What?

LARSON: Applesauce. That's what we all say, Boss. It's all a loada applesauce.

EDISON: Applesauce...! (laugh) Hah! Bottle -- bottle that and sell it! Ah, Larson, you have a genius for cheering me up. (yawn) ... but why can't I get a good night's sleep? I can sleep standing up on a train, I can sleep at the theatre, but I can't sleep in my own bed and dream of lambs and fishes and birds, with the darling wife snoring beside me -- (dozes off)

LARSON lays a blanket over EDISON.

LARSON: Nobody's never gonna beat you, Boss. Nobody never.

Exits. A light swoops down from above. EDISON looks up -- the light pulses, tantalizing, chirping like a songbird -- he reaches for it, but as he comes near, it pulls out of reach. He chases the light, and when he is exhausted, enter TWAIN controlling the light. Music cue: "Take Me Out to the Ballgame". TWAIN plays him like a ventriloquist's dummy.

EDISON: Here, little birdie, come to Poppa -- that's it, just a little closer... (grabs and misses) Damn! Has that fried bastard got alternating current?

TWAIN: Why destroy Camelot, Tom? Why hate Arthur's great kingdom?

EDISON: I don't understand it!

TWAIN: I know how confusing this must be. Let me help. Ask the secret question you most want to ask, but dare not. Trust me. I'm Mark Twain.

EDISON: There is one thing I've always wanted to know: what's electricity?

TWAIN: Yes, absolutely.

EDISON: Yes, what?

TWAIN: That's right.

EDISON: What's electricity --

TWAIN: Yes.

EDISON: What?

TWAIN: Naturally.

EDISON: Naturally?

TWAIN: Yes.

EDISON: Electricity is naturally...?

TWAIN: No, you haven't been listening. We measure electricity with watts, after Mr Watt.

EDISON: If I stick a fork in the wall, and I get a bad shock, who do I call?

TWAIN: Watt.

EDISON: All I'm askin' is what's the name of the guy I call.

TWAIN: Yes.

EDISON: I'm talkin' to a deaf guy!

TWAIN: There's no need to shout, now! If we don't see you in the future, Tommy, I'm sure we'll see you in the pasture!

TWAIN exits, whistling "Take me out to the ball game".

EDISON awakens, fearful -- HEWITT enters.

EDISON: Aiee! I had a nightmare and I'm not even asleep!

HEWITT: Th-that would be the cocaine, Boss.

EDISON: Hewitt, my best boy.

HEWITT: (wide-eyed) Me...?

EDISON: Come here, son. I want to know if I can count on you. Can I count on you, Mr Hewitt?

HEWITT: Yes, sir!

EDISON: Yesterday, I was king of the heap. Am I on yesterday's heap? (beat) You're a fine lad. Can you work fast? I need you to do a job for me. Can you spell...? Well, get some older boys to help you. Print up a flyer. "Alternating Current Exposed and Condemned!" Got that? "Dangerous! Deadly! Special Demonstration!" Get them to all the paperboys you can find. Spread them around. Invite everyone down to the warehouse. We'll make the morning edition if you work fast. (HEWITT starts out) Hold your horses, harness that energy! Do you likes dogs...? I want you to go out, round up dogs and bring `em down to the warehouse.

HEWITT: Kine a dogs?

EDISON: Immaterial.

HEWITT: Imma-terriers -- ?

EDISON: Bring them to the warehouse. There's a boy, noooooow -- go! (alone) Don't be afraid. The Boss won't let him burst your light bubbles. Tsk. You know, it's not winning I enjoy so much as beating the other guy.

Darkness. In the darkness, sounds of dogs barking. They are being electrocuted: flashes and sparks illuminate the grim work, like arc welding. Transition to Westinghouse's lab. WESTINGHOUSE concludes a tour for TWAIN. They stop at a refrigerator. WESTINGHOUSE opens and closes the door.

TWAIN: Thank you, Mr "W". The tour of your factory gave ample evidence of the vision that inspires so much acquisitiveness among the public.

WESTINGHOUSE: Glad I could help, Twain. But here, look at these: Nikola Tesla's original patent applications for AC power -- be warned! These are biblical truths -- you know what crazy people run around quoting, hear what I'm saying? God, this is exciting. I can't believe I'm doing it! Do you

know how historical this? It's hiss-torical! For Tesla, and Westinghouse. People will link the name of "W" with AC power forever! "W" will be a household word! Lord, are we visionaries, or -- No! Damn lucky's what we are!

TWAIN: Are we. Tesla. The Serbian god/man. Who since leaving Edison's employ, has taken what work he can get -- including digging ditches. If he's so epiphenominal, why is he up to his knees in mud?

WESTINGHOUSE: Ditches! I'll see to it he never looks at dirt for the rest of his life! Heaven forbid -- !

TWAIN: I have heard rumours that Mr Tesla spends an unseemly amount of time in the halls of spherical ill repute.

WESTINGHOUSE: Snooker! Heaven forbid! Is he any good -- ?

TWAIN: (confidential) Triple bank shots....

WESTINGHOUSE: (impressed) Triple...!

TWAIN: (slight pause) Say, what's this?

WESTINGHOUSE: I call it -- a refrigerator.

TWAIN: What is it for?

WESTINGHOUSE: We're not sure yet.... But it appears to keep dead things from rotting.

TWAIN: How useful.

WESTINGHOUSE: The only problem is, I'm never sure that the little light inside goes off when I close the door...

TWAIN: This calls for an investigation.

Together, they try to catch the light going off. They fail. They try again. TWAIN gets into the fridge and shuts the door behind him. (Alternately, the fridge can be offstage.) Enter TESLA.

TESLA: 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104. Hello, Mr Westinghouse.

WESTINGHOUSE: 104 what?

TESLA: 105. I'm sorry? Did you just say, "What's it for"?

WESTINGHOUSE: No, I said... Have you retired your shovel?

TESLA: Yes! I'm thinking of having it gold-plated.

WESTINGHOUSE: Good. Good. Nick. The abstract to the Commission looks good. Edison, the snake, remember him -- ? He's been lobbying the state to limit conduction to 800 volts -- but we've got him, nailed him, under state conspiracy laws. He knows when to retreat. Nick, you know, we may have to slow down, and let people catch up...! (slight pause) Nah, this is more fun! You're going to say this is impossible! You're going to ask where did the money come from. The answer is this: everyone should be so lucky, once, to attend a meeting where what is on the table is a plan to change the world...! Ahem. And so, authorized by the directors of "W" Electric, I offer you a cheque for one million dollars for all rights to the 40 original AC patents. As agreed, you will be paid a royalty of \$2.50 for every horsepower of generating capacity built from these patents. Oh! Here's a watch, so you'll know when the new century starts. Read the inscription --

TESLA takes the pocket watch. (or beeping wrist watch anachronism?)

TESLA: (reads) "Tesla Electric Company." Say, that's smart.

WESTINGHOUSE: Gotta catch my breath. What a day. You can build your own lab. Do you want to say anything...? For the history books...?

WESTINGHOUSE holds out an imaginary microphone.

TESLA: Tomorrow...?

Bows, exits. WESTINGHOUSE leans, contentedly, on his fridge.

WESTINGHOUSE: (awed) There he goes... Mr Tomorrow...!

Blackout. Edison's lab. HEWITT rolls out boxes on wheels. This scene can be played in blackout.

LARSON: Bring me the pointer.

HEWITT: I don't see why we hafta use the poin'er. A poin'er isn't dist a dog. A poin'er isn't dist something you use in a lab! It's special! Used for huntin'!

LARSON: Huntin'? In Manhattan, Sparky?

HEWITT: She might dream of it! If you don't care, then how come we can't use that retriever!

LARSON: Okay, okay. Jeez, Hewey, don't get tearful on me! I thought they tortured youses, turned youse out coarse! I pegged you wrong. Point out the retriever. (slight pause) Now, retrieve me the pointer.

HEWITT gives in, takes the dog to LARSON. LARSON enthusiastically electrocutes it.

LARSON: Personal feelin's got nothin' to do with science, Hewey. Hey!

LARSON picks up a device like a salad bowl with wires attached.

LARSON: I wanna test something for the Boss. Touch this.

HEWITT: I'm not touchin' nothin'. The last time you made me touch something, my eyebrows fell off.

LARSON: Hewey, you're a smart kid, but I don't like ya. You better pitch in around here, or I might have to call... the Orphan People!

HEWITT: But I don't wanna go back to the orph -- !
LARSON:

LARSON holds out the apparatus. HEWITT reluctantly touches it, and gets an electric shock. LARSON laughs.

HEWITT: Hah-hah. Say g'bye to my eyebrows....

LARSON: No, I'm trying to stop that. I don't want the Boss to fry his bread!

HEWITT: I think he knows better than that!

LARSON: Sure, Hewey, he knows better. (laugh) D'y'know what this is?

Unveils an apparatus.

HEWITT: (bug-eyed) You made Alternating Current -- !

LARSON: Yeah.

HEWITT: He's gonna kill you -- !

LARSON: Nah.

HEWITT: But I thought --

LARSON: Save your thoughts for the crap-house wall. Sit down. Lemme try a little -- flip the thing-a-ma -- jigger the mizzenmast here, and -- voila!

HEWITT sits on a chair. LARSON places the metal bowl upside-down on HEWITT's head. Turns his generator on. Puts on rubber gloves, goggles, touches contacts to the bowl. HEWITT yelps.

LARSON: (thrilled) Whoo! Where'd the Boss be without me. Ideas comin' thick and fast. Didn't know I had `er in me...!

LARSON turns the generator up to HIGH. He is about to touch contacts to the bowl. EDISON enters with a paper.

EDISON: Turn that racket off!

LARSON does so.

It's all right here in the Times, for Pete's sake: Tesla gets his ideas from outer space! (laugh) There's your immigration problem! "Tesla hears voices from beyond the grave! Consorts with fortune tellers! Comes from a country full of witches, and bats, and dragons! He sleeps on an electric bed like a, like a...!"

LARSON: Faker?

EDISON: (fa-keer) Fakir! They take him seriously! Not just morons, but real engineers! Want to believe he's "the man who knows", or something!

LARSON: They're sayin' his deal with Westinghouse will make Tesla the richest man in the world in ten years....

EDISON: They haven't considered his dining bills! On the other hand, they're not all saplings -- they have doubts about parts of his Niagara proposal -- all this AC applesauce. Fakir! How could they give the contract to someone who could go bankrupt next week...?

HEWITT: But those are just rumours.

EDISON: Just rumours? Why do you think I started them? How do you think I got this country off gas in the first place?

"Dangerous gases! Explosive gas mains! Child victims of gas!"

LARSON: Gotcha, Boss.

EDISON: I should hope you got me.

LARSON: Everyone knows AC is impossible. But I've been fiddling around and I've come up with something, with AC --

EDISON: Is that what I pay you for? To fiddle around while the Fakir burns my power stations?

LARSON: No, it's -- we were thinkin' we need is something a little bigger than dogs and chickens -- that there's a better angle -- a wow kind a finish!

EDISON: What's he on about? A "wow" finish?

LARSON: The public's comin' out for the dogs. That's okay. But when they start gettin' bored we could move on to horses and cows. But that'll get messy `cause the animals empty their bowels when you give `em the juice, so --

EDISON: Larson, could you get to the point, before I lose my lunch?

LARSON: They might be innerested in what you say about AC bein', like, suicidal. 'Tesla's Deadly Current'. Right? So, if some stooge was to, I dunno, have an accident...?

EDISON thinks about LARSON's idea. EDISON and LARSON look at HEWITT who becomes very nervous.

HEWITT: What...! What...!

EDISON: James Watt, son, James Watt! (beat) I might normally blow a head gasket if I found AC equipment in my lab. So long as we all know that AC is officially impossible.

LARSON: Oh, yeah, we know that.

HEWITT: I told him, Boss --

EDISON: Quiet son. (flips open paper) Look at this. Willy Kemmler, convicted killer to be hung by the neck until dead at Sing Sing. What a way to go. Hands tied, blindfolded, thrashing like a snared rabbit. It can take a man sometimes

15 minutes to die. What does a man think about? Willy Kemmler. My heart just fairly goes out to the boy. 17 years old. A child. His life hardly begun. We can do something about this. Larson, get the Warden of Sing Sing, and the Governor. Tell them what we have.

LARSON: (not quite catching on) What do we have...?

EDISON: A new patent, Mr Larson! Hanging is barbaric! Willy Kemmler won't hang, and he'll have you and Mr Tesla to thank. Get on it, Mr Larson!

Blackout. Enter TESLA with mysterious light. He surveys the height and range of a great empty space. He holds a gold-plated shovel. Twirls it. It is alive with sound. He invents air-guitar -- playing Jimi Hendrix's American national anthem a la feedback. Enter HEWITT.

TESLA: Here, miracles will be commonplace. Here, dreams and wishes will be paramount and prophecies made.

ABBY: Mr Tesla? Is this gonna be your lab?

TESLA: Do you like it?

ABBY: It's huge!

TESLA: It's big enough. For now.

ABBY: It's great!

TESLA: It will be. (beat) Mr Hewey? What can I do for you? Has Mr Edison sent an apology and a cheque for \$50,000...?

ABBY: No.... (beat) Can I work for you?

TESLA: Thank you, Mr Hewey, but I don't think so. I'll be looking for skilled engineers from sundry international --

ABBY: I'm good with numbers! I changed. I woke up, and I was different.

TESLA: (planning) Hmmn, metal reinforcements there, and there.... What's that, Mr Hewey? You've changed? What did you change into?

ABBY: I was a stunt rider. In the circus. But I kept falling off the elephants. I started getting awful headaches. A doctor told me my brain was too big. He recommended mathematics. And sleeping with a piece of radium under my pillow. Like Mary Curry! My headaches went away. And then, one day, I woke up with a proof of Fermat's Last Theorem, floating, in front of me. Where n is greater than 2 there are no whole numbers x , y , z and n that solve the equation $x^n + y^n = z^n$ which is intuitively on the money, right...? Goes like this -- have you got about a week...? We have to exhaust a lotta cases. You know Cantor's theory of infinite numbers, Gödel's theorem -- You sort of, I dunno, blenderize `em on high -- and pour them through a axiom consistency provability filter -- ! Oops.... There's one more thing, Mr Tesla.

TESLA: Another change?

ABBY: (takes off her hat) I'm... other gendered.

TESLA: Things are changing pretty fast, but that's a little fast even for me. Are you saying that a piece of radium under your pillow changed you into a girl? Fascinating. How long did this take?

ABBY: No, I've always been a girl. That's how I got a job? In Mr Edison's lab?

TESLA: Ah... We'd better get you to the patent office...!

He offers his arm. She happily takes it. Exeunt.
Transition to Patent Office. Enter EDISON hauling the electric chair. WESTINGHOUSE enters carrying a toaster. Only after realizing that they can't avoid one another, do they break into greetings.

WESTINGHOUSE: Shit. We-hell, Tommy...!

EDISON: Shit. Hey, Georg-ie boy...!

WESTINGHOUSE: How's Sarah? Tom, jr? Sally? And little Oakley?

EDISON: Fine, fine -- and Crandall? George, jr? Wes? And little Millicent?

WESTINGHOUSE: Couldn't be better. Randle is going to be a lawyer. Tell Sally to watch for him at Stanford -- !

EDISON: -- Harvard, heh -- !

WESTINGHOUSE: Heh...! New, uh, patent, Tommy?

EDISON: We've had a productive week! What's that you've got there?

WESTINGHOUSE: A bread fryer! It's for frying bread...!

EDISON: Tasty! You know, between you and me, I really don't feel comfortable coming down here --

WESTINGHOUSE: No.

EDISON: Makes me jumpy --

WESTINGHOUSE: Itchy.

EDISON: Strange people.

WESTINGHOUSE: Getting stranger all the time!

EDISON: I think insanity is spreading up through the Patent Office, like bad sap. D'y'hear what the Commissioner of Patents, did?

WESTINGHOUSE: What --

EDISON: He asked President McKinley to disband this office!

WESTINGHOUSE: No...!

EDISON: Swear to God. He said, "Everything that can be invented, has been invented."

They both burst into laughter.

EDISON: I understand one of my graduates is with you now -- Telsa...?

WESTINGHOUSE: Tesla, yes.

EDISON: Hard to warm up to -- ?

WESTINGHOUSE: No, I've found him quite charming.

EDISON: Oh, sure. But... odd ideas?

WESTINGHOUSE: Some quite interesting.

EDISON: Mmmn. Still working for you?

WESTINGHOUSE: Mmmn.

EDISON: Mmmn. Trouble nailing him down though?

WESTINGHOUSE: None so far.

EDISON: What's this we hear about a contract?

WESTINGHOUSE: Yes, licensing rights, and rights of first refusal on all new --

EDISON: But not \$2.50 a horse.

WESTINGHOUSE: -- which in our opinion he deserves.

EDISON: George, one would think your real intention is to send him back to hustling snooker. You don't really see Westinghouse growing that big?

WESTINGHOUSE: It's not a question of how big 'W' is going to grow, Tom. The point is, AC is the winner.

EDISON: Is it now.

WESTINGHOUSE: You know it is. Sure you do. Everyone's coming aboard. DC will soon go the way of the telegraph -- Dead and Clobbered -- there's something you something about.

EDISON: Now wait just a --

WESTINGHOUSE: You were left twisting in the wind by the telephone. (sigh) The terrible pain, eh, of being an inventor...

EDISON: I hardly think twisting in the wind -- !

WESTINGHOUSE points at EDISON -- "gotcha." EDISON recovers.

EDISON: Oh, you may be right. It's a wonderful thing to throw money at your boy, and keep your Board happy. Guts! Hat's off to ya. I know when I'm licked. Say -- you want tickets to see Houdini at the Palace, tonight?

WESTINGHOUSE: Thanks, I'm staying in with the missus -- frying bread...!

EDISON: Do that, Georgie-boy.

EDISON goes off to one side, rolls up his sleeves and does some fine-tuning work on his electric chair. Enter TESLA and ABBY.

TESLA: Duro! Do you mind if I call you "Duro"? It would be your approximate name in Serbian.

WESTINGHOUSE: Call me anything you like -- Duro's fine.

TESLA: Has the Niagara Falls Commission come out yet?

WESTINGHOUSE: (checks his watch) Ach! This is depressing. I hate waiting for non-scientists to decide our future. What right do they have --

TESLA: Duro. Meet Abby Fletcher, my new bookkeeper. I was just explaining to Abby how, some day, creatures of light will visit us from another planet, but they will ignore us altogether, and go straight to our power stations, and talk to our turbines...!

TESLA passes his hand past a row of lights and they brighten and trace out beautiful flowerings on the walls.

WESTINGHOUSE: Creatures? Of light?

ABBY: He doesn't really believe in critters from other planets.

TESLA: Oh, but I do. I hope to hear from them one day.

WESTINGHOUSE: (uneasy) Don't let Edison hear this stuff, Nick, unless you want to see yourself on the cover of the Times with pointy ears --

TESLA: Tom isn't diabolical. He just wants all the toys in the yard.

ABBY: Hey, I worked for the guy. He's greedy.

TESLA: As a matter of fact Tom was quite receptive to my ideas of life on other worlds.

WESTINGHOUSE: This is all very interesting, Nick, but we're leaving ourselves wide open. You haven't been protecting your work. 100's of people are profiting from it. Do you want to make millionaires of interlopers -- ?

ABBY: Nick's a genius, Mr "W", but he hasn't invented everything yet. Well has he? Have you? No. So there.

WESTINGHOUSE: Let's share a rational moment. Edison, he says genius is 1% inspiration, and 99% politics --

ABBY: I think it's 99% "perspiration."

WESTINGHOUSE: Do I have to remind you that you are collecting royalties. Westinghouse stock is taking a beating. I need this Niagara decision. Edison's driving up prices and underbidding. It's a standard one-two combination. As our costs go up, God help us if we can't keep a line of credit open.

TESLA: What are you going to do about it?

WESTINGHOUSE: What am I going to do about it? I'm going to burst with pride.

TESLA: I don't follow.

WESTINGHOUSE: As of next month, AC power will light the mines of Colorado! It was a hard sell, but I got `em!

TESLA: Congratulations.

WESTINGHOUSE: Thank you. You have never seen pennies pinched so tight till copper trickles out from between those miners' fingers!

ABBY: Which mines...?

WESTINGHOUSE: All of them...!

WESTINGHOUSE pops the toaster -- it is full of money.
TESLA takes a bundle and ABBY takes a bundle.

TESLA: Money!

WESTINGHOUSE: Not much, but it's a start. It'll generate a buzz.

ABBY: Nick's the greatest of them all! I want to see him lift up all 2 million tons of the human race and carry us forward as many steps as he can before he dies! I want the name "Tesla Electric Company" on the back of every business and home appliance for the next million years...!

WESTINGHOUSE: Tesla Electric. On every appliance. What about Westinghouse Electric?

ABBY: Er, I mean....

Enter DUEL, Commissioner of the Patent Office.

DUEL: Are the parties present?

WESTINGHOUSE: Yes, sir.

EDISON: Yo -- !

EDISON wipes his hands with a rag, makes himself presentable.

DUEL: Since accepting this appointment to the Patent Office, the both of you know that I have done everything in my power to shut it down.

EDISON: What is the decision?

DUEL: -- because nothing you do, is of consequence.

EDISON: You fruitcake...!

WESTINGHOUSE: Don't break formation, Tom -- !

DUEL: Because, gentlemen? Inventions don't work.

Pause. Look at each other, then:

WESTINGHOUSE & EDISON (joining): Inventions don't work...?

DUEL: I've been reading a man named Isaac Newton. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Thus, if wheels remove energy from the water, water will cease to move. Bad economics. If lightning is pulled from the sky, the sky will certainly lose its blue. Bad economics.

EDISON: Lose its blue...?

DUEL: I'm not the most brilliant man who has ever lived --

EDISON: No, Commissioner, you are not.

WESTINGHOUSE: We're agreed, Commissioner, but what about Niagara Falls!

DUEL: Nature is economical. Nature doesn't need me. Nature doesn't need you. Everything that can be invented, has been invented. Quod erat demonstrandum.

WESTINGHOUSE: Yes, brilliant, but we want the decision, Commissioner...?

DUEL: We stand on rock, thick as night. Can't you smell the dinosaur bones? Man has no wings -- wax melts -- feathers, gentlemen, are for dusting, not -- (sneezes) -- do you see my point?

EDISON: Right there on the top of your head you flaming crackpot -- !

DUEL: It was... a tie.

EDISON: Oh, give me strength. For the love `o Pete, man, how could you allow a tie? You blithering -- !

DUEL: Of course, I had the deciding vote. The vote of reason.

EDISON and WESTINGHOUSE grab copies of the written decision.

DUEL: God didn't make Niagara Falls for our cheap use. Leave them alone.

ABBY: How did he vote -- ? How did he vote -- ? (reads) Despite certain reservations concerning this hithertofore blah blah blah ... majestic blah blah blah ... great promise. Nikola Tesla's Alternating Current is the wave of the future. (giddy) WE WON NIAGARA FALLS -- !

EDISON: Shit.

WESTINGHOUSE: God bless America...!

TESLA: I feel I haven't slept for weeks. Now, I could fly!

WESTINGHOUSE: Do that in my lab and there's 50,000 bucks for you...!

ABBY takes WESTINGHOUSE's papers and flips through them.

ABBY: (shocked realization) Where's the distribution deal?

EDISON: (reads a happy discovery) Hello! "Edison's greater experience..."

ABBY: (reads) "Compromise..." What's this about "a compromise in the best interests of all concerned" -- ? Edison put in a separate distribution bid! They divided the contract!

WESTINGHOUSE: They what? Lemme see that -- !

WESTINGHOUSE grabs the contract from ABBY.

WESTINGHOUSE: Edison distributes our electricity? I build the power station, I generate the power. And that weasel --

ABBY: We bake the cake, and Edison --

WESTINGHOUSE: Makes all the money...? We have been cheated...

WESTINGHOUSE starts to have trouble breathing.

ABBY: Sit down, "W" -- put your head between your knees.

TESLA: Wonderful. This is a complete vindication. This proves that my electricity is safe.

WESTINGHOUSE: He knows it's safe -- ! He's always known it's safe -- ! Stop kidding around -- ! What planet are you from?

TESLA: According to who: the New York Times, or the Daily News...?

WESTINGHOUSE: This isn't smoke and mirrors! It's war! There will be casualties! I feel faint.

ABBY: Count to 3.14165 --

WESTINGHOUSE: (slight pause) Gee, that helped. Okay, too late for chicken-egg disputes about truth and rumours. Too late to blame Edison for an unstable marketplace. You see what we're up against! Sheer mercantile brilliance! Look at him, salivating over our turbines! Look at that insufferable grin! I'm going to lose my famous sunny disposition...!

TESLA: Well, I'm going to congratulate him.

WESTINGHOUSE: Over my dead body! You're supposed to grab me, and stop me! I could peel his skin -- he's coming over -- Exit, stage left...!

WESTINGHOUSE scurries away, as EDISON nears.

EDISON: Georgie...! Aw....

ABBY: Nick, please, don't let me hurt him!

TESLA: Shhh, Abby, don't worry.

ABBY: I'm too beautiful to go to jail!

TESLA: Abby. Watch this....

EDISON: Well, there, Tesla...?

EDISON extends a hand. TESLA bows. ABBY shrinks behind him.

EDISON: Who's that hiding back there? Oh, sorry, Miss. Thought I knew ya. Here we are, Tesla! Class reunion.

TESLA: Congratulations, Tom. This is a great day.

EDISON: What -- ?

TESLA: For electricity.

EDISON: I suppose ... well, yes it is...!

TESLA: I saw the pose for what it was. I knew the real Thomas Edison would knock some sense into that fool who has been blocking progress.

EDISON: (thinks) Oh, you mean Duel? Takes all kinds, doesn't it...

TESLA: I knew you would eventually begin to comprehend my work. It takes time for pasta to absorb water. I'm delighted to bury the American god of competition. Never again will those yellow fangs drip with gore after a dogfight in the market-place. From now on, competition will be measured in terms of how much social good is accomplished, not whether "A" can eat "B", skin, bones and all.

EDISON: I have AC. I'm not looking for a lyricist.

TESLA: I don't mean to offend, Tom, but AC, in your hands, would be like putting a child in the White House.

EDISON: I'm glad you don't mean to offend -- !

TESLA: AC has much wilder potential than you could possibly understand, even if I ran 100,000 volts through you. It's fitting we combine our energies.

EDISON: Say what?

TESLA: I have hundreds of revolutionary ideas to discuss. In fact, I have invented several new fields. As business proposals. Written in lay terms with no technical detail. To protect my interests, you understand. Abby -- ?

ABBY hands papers to a surprised EDISON. He is bewildered as he tries to process what follows --

ABBY: Radar. Turbine. Robotics and remote control. 12 new electro-magnetic motors. 2 new systems of electrical distribution. Electric arc lamp and method of operating electric arc lamp. Incandescent lamp. Electric railway system. Fluid propulsion system. Aerial transportation system. Apparatus for the utilization of radiant energy. You'll like this one, Boss -- lightning protector... Listen carefully -- Apparatus for intensifying and utilizing effects transmitted from a distance to a receiving device... Know what that means.

ABBY withholds that one.

TESLA: Thank you, Abby. Read them at your leisure.

EDISON: Yeah, yeah, I'll get... I'll get right on it....

EDISON exits dumbfounded with all the manuscripts.
TESLA calls --

TESLA: Sounds like good business to me...! That was fun, you know. I hope he's all right. Tom really has done a fine job with a primitive form of power. A commendable job. A basic job. You can't take that away from the Wizard of the 19th Century.

Enter TWAIN, apart from, and watching them unseen.

TESLA: He'll help me build a world perfect as a machine. He doesn't know it yet -- how could he, he can't see the machine for the parts -- but let him go home and... evolve.

ABBY: I've never seen anyone intimidate him like you.

TESLA: Should I have added I come from a line of warriors, that if he got on my bad side, he might as well --

ABBY: Think he got the message. Want a drink, soldier -- ?

TESLA: A Manhattan in a barrel big enough to go over the Falls in.

ABBY: We're tuned. Tomorrow we beat the Wizard at his own game. I better look at the books. But I'm sure we can afford a New Year's Eve party.

TESLA: At the Ritz?

ABBY: Natch.

ABBY & TESLA: (sing) We're off to beat the Wizard, the wonderful Wizard of Menlo Park...!

They laugh as they exit together. TWAIN looks out to the audience, shields his eyes from the lights..

TWAIN: Mr Morgan...? Sorry, I've gotta stick my neck out here. There's a nice piece we've been working up. A kid up from Kansas by name of Willy Kemmler. Willy's a nice kid, a good kid. We think he's got himself a real strong closer for the first act, a wow kind of finish...! What's that -- ? Thank you, Mr Morgan, thank you. (bowing) I thank you, he thanks you, his mother thanks you. (claps hands) Boys -- !

TWAIN exits. Enter EDISON, looking at some notes.

EDISON: Let's be sure we've got it. What are the voltages: um... 1725 volts for 10 seconds. And then 240 volts for 90 seconds. (calls) What are these 240 volts for? Mr Larson...?

LARSON: (off) Those'r to, like, wash it out of his system.

EDISON: Wash what out of his system -- I'm trying to write a press release?

LARSON: (entering) Uh, that'd be life, Boss.

EDISON: Life! Good Lord, can't we call it something else?

LARSON: Biological action?

EDISON: No...!

LARSON: Vital flux?

Unhappy, EDISON exits muttering.

BIG VOICE: (off) Ladies and Gentlemen... Mark Twain -- !

Enter TWAIN, as host.

TWAIN: Thank you, thank you, how you doin' -- ! We've got a special treat for you tonight. A great new escape artist will now perform the most death-defying escape ever! Willy Kemmler has 30 seconds to free himself before 1725 deadly volts of raw AC electricity make their way from here (touches his head), to here (touches his heart), and finally, to here (touches his rear end). Give it up for a man who never has to sing sing for his supper! Everywhere he goes they sing sing his name -- Willy!

Enter WILLY, a prisoner. LARSON fastens him to the chair.

TWAIN: Orchestra -- !

Cue electrocution. The switch is thrown. AC electricity rips through WILLY screams. Sound can help create the impression that a new gate to hell has opened. WILLY struggles, screams, until he is dead.

TWAIN: Willy -- ! Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain, folks -- !

He indicates EDISON operating the controls of the generator. EDISON grins, waves. TWAIN dons a chef's apron, oven mitts, and holds a prong and a bottle of sauce.

TWAIN: Y'all come back in 15 minutes! We're gonna serve up some barbecue and party well into the next Century -- !

Blackout.

Interval.