

The Handsome Family

"Tesla's Hotel Room"

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In the last days of wonder
When spirits still flew
where we sat holding hands
In half-darkened rooms

Nicola Tesla
In the hotel New Yorker
nursing sick pigeons
by the open window

dreamed of a death ray
To disintegrate matter
detected Morse code
From faraway planets

he couldn't stand the touch
of hair or of skin
but stroked feathers gently
on trembling wings

and drew plans for a camera
To photograph thoughts
Vacuum tube lights
Wireless phones

In the last days of wonder
When spirits still flew
Round bubbling test tubes
In half-darkened rooms

Edison and Westinghouse
in silk brocade
ate oysters Rockefeller
with French champagne

But Tesla grew thin
eating only saltines
going days in his lab
Without any sleep

dreaming of god

as an X-ray beam
he was hit by a cab
while crossing the street

lying on his bedspread
he struggled to breathe
the light bulbs exploded
the air filled with wings

In the last days of wonder
When spirits still flew
Tesla vacated
his half-darkened room
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