

Episode 7
Crosswinds Plantation
11:20 AM, March 8th,

As Sara was sailing with off Ty, Cameroon suggested to the remaining Buckeye Beauties, “The band is hot; let’s rehearse Big Daddy.”

“We can’t; Sara sings lead,” Dotty remarked.

“Oh, I will sing her part,” Cameroon asserted; “I learned it months ago.”

They agreed.

“It’s going to be hot as hell in another hour.”

“Go change into your practice attire, then meet back here in twenty minutes.”

Walking past the band, they agreed, “We could move with their sound all night!

Cameroon pointed at one of the members, “That kid invented this style of music. Ty wants him to compose some music for your shows.”

Twenty minutes later, they began rehearsing Big Daddy under a vast blue shade sail halfway between the beach and the band's gazebo.

New Orleans Navy Base

11:25 am March 8th



Admiral Forti quickly connected the Agents with a small steam-powered nonmilitary water taxi. It belonged to his Chief Engineer (and avid local fisherman), Captain Fredric Wouda.

“With its windows out of the way, it's a decent fishing boat,” Wouda told the agents as they boarded. “As long as you keep fishing poles visible, no one pays any attention.”

“You got any food aboard?”

“A couple of rusty cans of fish are under my seat. I think the rust is only on the outside of the cans.”

“What kind of fish?”

“Just says fish.”

“Never mind,” Lemont responded.

“Where you fellows from?”

“I lived here as a small child. When I was eleven, we moved to Ohio,” Lemont replied.

“He was never a small child,” Colin added. “Nicky,” pointing at Tesla, “comes from Croatia, a colony on Mars.”

“Wow! I have spent a year in Split, Pula, and Mahaska. Croatia has some of the most beautiful coastlines on earth,” Wouda said before noticing, “Holy mackerel! You’re Tesla, the greatest inventor!”

“I think DaVinci and Franklin would disagree.”

Wouda jumped to shake Nicola’s hand, “I am your biggest fan! You are a god to navel engineers!”

“Oh, you are too kind. I am just driven, man.”

Colin added, “Lady Azacca thinks Nicky is the god of thunder and lightning.”

“Who’s that?” Wouda asked.

“The Cajun Queen of Crime.”

Wouda turned back to Tesla, “Admiral Forti convinced the feds to let me have two four-kilowatt dynamo beasts that you designed. Their drive power is phenomenal.”

“That’s great, my friend!”

“Your inventions are amazing. I can’t believe you are right here!”

Instantly missing drunks telling him how great he is, Colin realized that he had already missed two show nights at Flanagan's.

"How did he get Washington to give them to you? They cost as much as a locomotive to build!" Tesla asked.

"He told President Arthur that I could build a 30-knot, smoke-free, no warm-up, nearly silent reconnaissance boat if he had one of these four-kilowatt dynamos. So, the president sent two!"

"How far along is your prototype?"

Wouda pointed at a wooden hatch on the floor, "It's right here, fully installed. But unfortunately, I can't resolve a power maintenance issue, so we can only use steam power today."

"What's the issue?" Tesla asked.

"It only supplies eminence power for two to three seconds, then nothing. Something is hindering the current flow. These batteries should supply at least 5 minutes of full power."

"How does it propel?" Tesla asked.

"The dynamo spins a robust version of Wheeler's fan blades. They push water the same way they push air. I call them propellers."

"That's brilliant!" Tesla replied.

"Beyond weight and density, water and air share most properties; your system will be revolutionary."

"I think so."

"I worked with Wheeler at Edison. I should have thought his fan could propel boats. I am happy that you noticed!"

“I would love to show you; it launches like a cannonball, but then nothing, Mr. Tesla.”

“I have developed multiple ways to deliver electricity.”

“You almost invented electricity!”

Colin quickly responded, “No, that was Benjamin Franklin and his kite.”

Tesla replied, “Captain, you and I will resolve this issue. Call me Nicola.”

“We all call him “Nicky,” Colin inserted.

“This is one of the best days ever!” the chief naval engineer replied.

“Maybe we should leave them alone,” Colin whispered to Lemont.

A moment later, Wouda turned the wheel over to Lemont.

After cruising a few more minutes, Wouda told the Lemont, “The canal to Lake Pontchartrain is coming up on the port (left) side.”

Then, “Oh great, you get to see something amazing first.”

“The Maximus Five, Ty Cross’s yacht, is about to pop into view right in front of us.” Wouda had noticed the flags on top of its 86-foot masts gliding above the warehouses on the east side of the canal.

Including the ship, those masts tower 120 feet above the water.

The agent’s jaws dropped as the enormous vessel (for 1885) entered the river a quarter mile in front of them.

As the 300-foot piece of nautical artwork turned their direction, Wouda explained:

“Many say it is the most beautiful ship on earth.”

“But I see it as one of the greatest marvels ever built.”

“It was the fifth steel-hulled tall ship built, but it is the first with dual propulsion systems. They work separately or together.”

“This is amazing.”

“Your dynamos and that ship’s dual drives inspired what I am doing to this little boat,” he told Nicola.

“The Maximus V has an electrically controlled steam drive to supplement its sails.”

“It is the fastest large ship on the seven seas.”

“It looks like a boxcar with big windows,” Lemont responded.

“Are you sure that’s the Maximus V?” Tesla asked.

“Yes. Why do you ask?”

“It says ‘Lady Sara’ across its haul.”

“I have admired it for two years; Captain Funk has given me a personal tour. I know that ship well; there is nothing else like it yet. Ty Cross must have changed its name,” Wouda responded.

Then Wouda yelled, “Oh shit! Funk is sails and full steam!”

“What does that mean!” Colin asked.

“He’s showing off like a bastard with too much money. It means **HOLD ON!**”

A few seconds later, the colossal vessel plowed past their starboard side. Its ten-foot wake slammed the little taxi three seconds later, nearly capsizing it.

“You Turd!” Colin hollered with one hand holding on and the other waving his fist.

“I’d be thrown in jail for leaving a wake like that on this river,” Wouda snarled.

“Around here, the rules don’t apply to people with money to burn,” he explained as the little boat bounced like a bobber on a rough sea.

“That’s pretty much the same everywhere,” Lemont said.

A minute later, Wouda pointed at a horizontal flag sticking out of the 50-foot brick tower at the canal’s entrance. “We need to wait until they switch that red flag for a green one,” which happened several seconds later.

“Oh, I forgot, this is a toll channel. Does anyone have a dime?” Wouda asked.

“That Voodoo Witch stole all the cash I had on me,” Colin excused.

“Do they extend credit?” Lemont asked as a dime seemed to appear in Nicola’s hand magically.

The toll collector extended a tight wicker basket attached to a bamboo pole. After Tesla tossed his dime into the basket, the liftgate opened.

While pointing at the white Marble wall just beyond the service road on the canal’s east side, Wouda said, “That wall surrounds Crosswinds on its three dry sides.”

It extended into the lake on both sides of Crosswinds but not along the lake. Ty had the white sand of his beach shipped from the Bahamas. Between his bright beach and the canal was the plantation’s double-level boat dock.

Once they reached the lake, Wouda cut the power and let Lemont free float for half an hour while hanging four fishing poles from the taxi's huge windows. Wouda reengineered those windows so they would easily fold up against the ceiling.

Lemont used Wouda's telescope to get a better look from about one-third of a mile away. "That guy knows how to live! He has a band playing and dancers dancing!"

"How many dancers?" Colin asked.

"The view is partially blocked. I see two, three, no four, so there could be many more."

"Let me see."

Lemont looked for a few more seconds before handing the telescope to Colin.

"That's Dolly and Elizabeth!"

"We found them!"

"No."

"For real! They are only 40 feet from the water!"

"Are you sure?"

"Positive! There is no one in between them and us."

"How many guards?"

"None."

"A large, weird-looking lady is dancing with them."

"That band is in a gazebo. Seven musicians, all brownies."

“Colin has a way with words,” Lemont informed the two nerdy engineers.

“They ain’t White Knights,” Colin added.

“There is a guard shack. It is behind the center dock. There is one guard there.”

“You would think they would be heavily guarded.”

“They are not chained or shackled; they could just leave on one of those small boats.”

“Are you sure it’s them?” Lemont asked.

“Now I see Daisy... and there is Dotty! We can grab them and go.”

“Calm down! We are only doing surveillance. Hayes does not want us touching another foreign property before his approval.”

“He could not imagine them being so close and unguarded!” Colin replied.

“We may never get another simple shot at them. Cross might take them to one of his Islands before we return.”

“We need to grab them now.”

“Cross could have just left. There would be less security when that ship is not here,” Lemont responded.

“Hayes trusts your judgment. If you report that you could have grabbed them this easily, he’ll be furious that we didn’t. He wants us to think on our feet enough to alter plans when needed.”

“Gummi that,” Lemont said as he snatched the telescope back.

“Yeah, that’s Liz, all right.”

“I see four...five of them. I think I see Sara behind that fountain.”

“Woo!”

“Woo, what?” Colin asked.

“A loaded buffet table beside the pool.”

“All right, Cole, let's do it. I'll blame you.”

“Like usual.”

“Like they say, if the shoe fits, wear it.”

“Fine, I'll take credit.”

“How do we quietly take out that guard?” Lemont asked.

“Dart him.”

“You need to be close, within 20 feet, so we would have to dock first without giving him enough time to sound the alarm.”

“I can swim most of the way underwater, then sneak up.”

“If the darts get wet, will they still work?” Lemont asked Colin.

“Hayes did not mention anything about that.”

“What do you think?” Lemont asked Tesla.

“I haven't read about bat spital. So, in this situation, I would assume it does wash off, to be safe.”

Wouda, who was also from Ohio, interrupted. “This is not Lake Erie. This is the most dangerous lake. It's both fresh and seawater.”

“What is so dangerous about that?”

“Millions of deadly sharks, alligators, and other evil creatures.”
It has tinny bugs that null through your ears to eat your brain.”

“Maybe Nicola can walk on water,” Colin responded.

Ignoring Colin, Tesla asked his new buddy, “Do you have 12 feet of quarter-inch vulcanized rubber tubing onboard?”

“Yes, I have a hundred feet of it.”

“How about some 12-gauge copper tubing?”

“I have three feet in brass.”

“Fine.”

“It’s all down there.”

“Colin, give me your belt; I need your darts.”

“All of them?”

“Yes.”

“Why don’t you share Lemont’s darts?”

“That’s your problem; I need your darts; give me your belt!”

“Fine,” as he slipped his belt off and handed it to Tesla.”

Tesla and Wouda slipped down into the cramped engine room below.

“My pants are falling off. Take the darts, give me the belt,” Colin yelled below.

“Hold on, we are moving as fast as possible,” Tesla replied.

“Colin, cast a line so we don’t look suspicious,” Wouda suggested.

“You should have worn your tight pants, Cole,” Lemont joked as he handed Colin a fishing pole.

“I only wear those at my shows. These trousers are three sizes too big. I need my belt back.”

“Fred, I can smell your power loss,” Tesla asserted. “These groove-cell batteries can’t maintain output so that full power will die in seconds.”

“This dynamo needs a couple hundred pounds of Nitro-muriatic batteries to hold full power through a full charge.”

“Admiral Forti also asked Washington to send us some. But unsuccessfully because they are all part of some top-secret project.”

“My ORPHS.”

“Your ORPHS?”

“That secret project. I will release two hundred pounds to you when I return to New York.”

“That should give this dynamo six to eight hours at 80%.”

“Wonderful, thank you, Nicola! What is an ORPH?”

“The insanely fast trains I build for NORA.”

“Electric Trains?”

“Partially, they use electric dynamos in the car’s wheels to supplement their steam-powered locomotive. They are hybrid drive, much like what you did with this boat.”

“Fascinating!”

“My newest ORPH is parked at the base.”

“Wow! Mind if I check it out?”

“I’ll give you a tour when we return.”

They connected one end of that rubber hose to that brass pipe and the other to the boiler's safety release valve. This was all it took to invent the world's first steam-powered dart blaster.

Suddenly, Colin caught something big.

His pants fell to his ankles as he stood for better leverage, yet he kept fighting his catch.

“Man, I know you can afford drawers,” Lemont remarked as he covered his eyes. At least hide that little thing.”

“You need glasses, big boy.”

“Magnifying glasses.”

As Colin continued fighting, Lemont yelled to the geniuses, “Colin needs his belt!”

Tesla stopped, then tossed the emptied belt up through the opening.

“Stay away from me!” Lemont barked while moving away without releasing the wheel.

“What’s going on?”

“Oh, Colin is free-balling.”

“Hand me that belt,” Colin asked his enormous partner, who flicked the belt to him from his boot. He put it back on with his right hand as his left continued fighting his big catch.

Tesla then slid one dart down the open end of the brass tube, shaking it to ensure the dart slid far enough down.

The old tree branch stuck to Colin’s line broke free, allowing it to float to the surface.

“Perfect, a test target,” Tesla said as he aimed his steaming dart gun at that branch from around thirty-five feet away. “Fred, fire!”

“Swish,” as Fred flicked the valve lever.

With bullet velocity, the dart drilled the tree branch.

“Nicky, just killed your dinner, big boy!” Colin responded.

“Fred cut the steam! It's burning me!” Tesla yelled as he dropped his high-powered pea shooter.

Fred closed the valve, then tossed a pair of asbestos gloves up through the hatch.

As Tesla slid them on, he told Lemont, “Just crawl toward that dock. Let’s bring him out to us.”

“When he drops, we must tie in as fast as possible.”

“Fred, build full steam; we’ll fire in around 60 seconds.”

“You keep time; just tell me when!”

“Got it!”

“Hey, Colin, why don’t you slide your line back into the water? We look suspicious.”

“Why don’t you go fishing while I shoot the thing? I’m a certified sharpshooter,” Colin suggested.

“So am I,” Tesla responded.

As they slowly approached that center dock, Nicola slid Colin’s 19 darts into his steaming blowgun one by one. He then crouched down behind a coal hopper, waiting for his shot.

They passed a warning sign sticking up through the water about one hundred feet out.

**PROPERTY OF TYBERIA
TRESPASSERS WILL BE SHOT**

Just as a bunk bed is two beds in one, that large was like two docks in one. The bottom level held little boats and was ideal for loading and unloading smaller boats undercover during storms. The upper level could simultaneously dock two of the largest ships, but two large ships would leave no space for small boats.

When the guard noticed them, he jogged out on the upper level, waving his rifle and yelling, “This is a private dock! Move away now!”

Colin yelled, “What? I can’t hear you!” as they continued slowly approaching.

“This is private property! Turn away now!” The guard yelled as he lifted his Winchester into firing position.

“WHAT?” Colin yelled from about forty-five feet away as Tesla told Fred, “Fire on one. Five, four, three, two, one!”

“SWISH, SWISH, SWISH, SWISH, SWISH.....!”

“Yeah!” Colin yelled as eighteen darts rained down.

A second later, the guard started wobbling; then, he fell unconscious, with a third of his body hanging over the water below.

“Alligators must understand gravity,” Tesla noted as several stared up at their potential dinner, dangling about twelve feet above them.

Cameroon and the musicians remained mesmerized by the sexy dancers in their skin-tight body socks, so no one noticed that the deck guard had been neutralized.

That tall ship dock also allowed the team to dock undetected.

After Nicola Colin and Lemont stepped onto the lower level, Wouda swung the water taxi around for a swift departure.

“You hear that?” Colin asked Lemont as they began creeping toward shore on the lower dock platform.

“Hear what?”

“They are doing ‘Big Daddy’.”

They climbed up the stairs to the upper platform and crawled undetected to that guard’s booth, about fifty feet away from their dancing beauties.

“Ready to grab them?” Lemont whispered.

Tesla and McLaughlin nodded.

Still assuming that all six beauties were present, Lemont asked Nicola, “You strong enough to carry two at once?”

“They don’t look heavy,” He replied.”

“Go,” Lemont whispered, and then all three sprinted toward the girls.

They were facing away from the beach and docks, towards the band; only that hairy, musclebound lady noticed them coming.

“Oh my, brutes!” Cameroon mumbled to himself. Instead of sounding the alarm, he smiled, batted his fake eyelashes, and twirled his long, curly hair.

Dolly, Daisy, Dotty, Dorothy, and Elizabeth had no clue Colin and Lemont had come to save them before they were suddenly being carried away.

Amazed, the band stopped playing, but like Cameroon, they just watched with their mouths hanging open.

Lemont grabbed Elizabeth and Dolly, and Colin draped Dotty and Dorothy over his shoulders.

Realizing that the lead singer was not a lady, Tesla flung Daisy over his shoulder. They hauled all five girls to Wouda’s hot boat taxi on the lower level.

This rescue would have worked had all five dancers not screamed, “PUT ME DOWN!” while their clenched fists pounded their savior's backs.

“Quit hitting me; it’s Colin. I’m rescuing you!”

“PUT ME DOWN, COLIN!”

“What the hell are you doing here?” Elizabeth yelled at Lemont when he put her down on the dock.

“Saving you!” He responded.

Daisy screamed, “You broke my nail!” Then she punched Tesla’s jaw.

“We don’t need rescuing!” Dorothy yelled as all five silk-wrapped beauties turned and returned to the beach.

“These Turds kidnaped you!” Colin yelled as he followed them back.

“We are no one’s hostages; we are rehearsing to do a private show for kings, queens, princes, and presidents. We are free to leave at any time,” Dorothy responded.

“Stay away from me; you stink like rotten fish,” Elizabeth yelled as she briefly turned to face her maybe former (secret) lover, Lemont.

Still following them, Colin yelled, “Where is Sara?”

Elizabeth briefly turned to Colin, “She is sailing on her new ship with the hottest man on earth.”

“What!”

“She already forgot your name!” Elizabeth said while running backward for a moment.

“You are under the spell of evil slave-driving Turds!” Colin yelled as he continued behind them.

Elizabeth turned back long enough to say, “Tell everyone we will return after a show and Sara’s wedding.”

“She was not happy to see me,” Lemont whimpered as he and Colin watched them run back.

Tesla yelled while tugging on their shirts, “We must go! They are not coming back with us!”

Tesla had to pull them back to Wouda’s boat.

“Get us out of here, Fred.”

As Wouda launched the taxi, he asked, “What happened?”

“They don’t want to be rescued!”

“Obviously.”

“Oh Crap, we’re losing steam pressure through the blowgun; take over, Lemont; I have to get below.”

Animus and five security men ran out of the mansion several seconds later.

“What just happened?” Animus asked the pasty white girls.

“Sara’s old boyfriend just tried to take us home on that dinky boat,” Dorothy answered while pointing at the water taxi, puttering away.

“We told him to leave, that Sara is no longer interested in him.”

“Who is he?”

“Colin McLaughlin.”

“What does Colin McLaughlin do?”

“He is a musician with a band in Columbus.”

Staring at the retreating water taxi, he mumbled, “Colin McLaughlin has balls of steel and amazing tracking power. He nearly beat you here.”

“Do you think he’ll return?” he asked the girls.

“No, he thought we were prisoners; now he knows better,” Elizabeth replied.

Animus glanced at the retreating boat and said, “There is more to Colin McLaughlin than just making music.”

He then ordered the girls, “Stay under the shade!”

Next, he walked out of the center dock to retrieve the unconscious guard, sorely disappointing a half-dozen gators below.

As he flung the unconscious guard over his shoulder, he noticed the little yellow darts scattered around.

He glanced back at the boat, slowly chugging into the canal; suddenly, he flung the guard over his shoulder and then ran towards the mansion.

As he shot past his men, he demanded, “Don’t let those bitches out of your sight!”

As he ran past the pool, he dumped his unconscious baggage into a wicker chair. Then, like a hairless mad momma polar bear out to protect her cubs, he charged that white marble wall beside the canal.

He ran up that 20-foot wall, grabbed its capstone, and flipped himself over. He landed on the service road along the canal, only forty feet behind the still slow-moving taxi, still running.

“What the hell is that?” Colin said as he and Nicola saw the man-beast rapidly closing on them after flipping over that wall.

As Colin drew his new Webley pistol, Tesla yelled, “Fred! Hit the electric drive NOW!”

“It only works for a couple of seconds!” Fred yelled back from below.

“HIT IT NOW!” Tesla again yelled as Animus launched into the air from a four-foot loading ramp about twelve feet away at them. The dynamo engaged at that instant, and the water taxi popped a water wheelie, shooting forward.

Two of Animus’s enormous fingers latched onto the stern (rear) plate. However, he needed three to hold on. He slashed face down into the canal.

About a second later, a giant fist rose above the water as he yelled, “Damn Yankees!”

“Was that an alligator?” Lemont, who was at the wheel, asked.

“I think it was half-human, nearly your size!” Colin yelled back.

“Nice work, Nicola!” Lemont acknowledged.

“Fred deserves the credit.”

“I was about to blast it until you made the boat jump!” Colin yelled.

“Shooting that would have angered it more,” Tesla said as he and Colin watched Animus climb onto the service road. He then waved that ‘up-yours arm motion’ at them.

“Did it think it could take us all out by hand?” Lemont asked.

“Evidently,” Tesla replied.

Colin could not mention that when the taxi pooped that wheelie, his hand slammed an open windowsill, knocking that priceless Webley prototype into the canal.

“Hey Nicky, do you have another dime?”

2:40 pm March 8th, 1885

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN THEY DON’T WANT TO BE RESCUED?”

Hayes yelled at Lemont through Admiral Forti’s telephone.

“We carried them to our boat, but they returned to the plantation.”

“Why?”

“I chased Liz; she said they will come home after performing some private show for kings.”

“What kings, where?”

“She did not say.”

“Were they drunk?”

“They seemed lucid, even happy.”

“They beat the crap out of us while we carried them to the boat; they hit harder than most men!”

“Well, dancers are athletes.”

“The mission was to find them, which was an astounding success. You almost beat them to New Orleans. At least they seem happy and well cared for.”

“Could this be a publicity stunt, Boss?”

“You said Liz said this is a private event, which would not want publicity.”

“I know Lester and Holly Kilbourn (Sara’s parents) very well. Sara would never do anything to worry them like this.”

“She even sends me cards on my birthday and at Christmas.”

“She sends them to me and momma.”

“Well, so do I.”

“Momma gets your cards, but I have never received one from you, Boss.”

“Hum, there must be a problem with the post office; it can’t be Ivonta; nothing gets by her.”

“Why would anyone prefer to remain a hostage, son?”

“Maybe because Ty Cross is showering them with gifts. Liz said that he gave his huge ship to Sara.”

“I know. Stone just verified that Cross transferred Maximus V's ownership to Sara. They say it is the most beautiful ship on earth.”

“Yeah, it’s beautiful. We saw it so close that we nearly capsized. It's now named “The Lady Sara.”

“What a strange turn of events.”

“Crazy, Boss.”

“How is Colin handling this?”

“He is a little hurt and angry but still ready for action. He misses his drunk fans more than anything.”

“You can’t force them to return. This mission was to find them, which you did, so the mission is over. It’s not your fault that they refused to leave.”

“There are still two key issues that need our attention.”

“Your assessment?”

“We are on the trail of those other missing ladies and those big men. We know that some, if not all, of them went through that Moroccan fort.”

“These people are running something far more sinister than putting on a show for kings. I would bet that island base holds the answers.”

“What were they wearing?”

“Who?”

“The girls.”

“Blue body-hugging outfits that left little to imagine. They were also wearing a load of jewelry. They brought no luggage; Cross must have bought them a jewelry store.”

“That’s just petty cash for him.”

“Anyways, how is Nicola doing?”

“He solves problems no one else sees.”

“You should have seen him manage that witch; now she believes he is a god. It was something to behold! Colin nearly wet himself.”

“I’d like to have seen that!”

“Colin wetting himself?”

“No, Nicola, the God. Ha, ha, ha!” Hayes cracked up.

“Don’t let anything happen to that boy; America needs him!”

“We need him to protect us,” Lemont thought.

“Well, anyway, Stone connected all 72 missing ladies.”

“What?”

“Not a single brunette among them; they are all blondes or redheads. What do you make of that?”

“Cross has dark hair. Maybe he wants to fill his Islands with blondes and redheads.”

“That does not make sense, son. He could pay all the blonds and redheads he wants to come live on his tropical islands.”

“Every time we answer a question about him, it creates many more,” Hayes said.

“Boss, the way I see it, we only have two main questions to answer.”

“Where are the other victims? And what in the hell are they doing?”

“The magic questions, son.”

“Ty Cross is not giving those big black men ships, jewels, and royal buffets. Too bad we did not come this far without trying to rescue them.”

“We are already here, Boss; we should continue.”

“Let me think about it. Is Nicola around? I need to talk to him.”

“He is at the ORPH, being worshipped by every navy engineer down here.”

“Tell God to call me as soon as he can. Tell him I’m sitting here waiting for his call.”

“Give me a few minutes, Boss.”

“Hayes out.....”

About ten minutes later, Tesla called Hayes.

“Your dancers have no desire to come home. They treated us like marauders trying to spoil their party.”

“I heard.”

“This is my fault.” I should have known this rescue would not work,” Tesla reported.

“No, it’s not your fault!”

“Oh yes, it is.”

“How?”

“They were not being guarded or watched; they could have easily left in boats docked just a few feet away.”

“I think I was too excited to ask myself why, which I normally do.”

“I should have known they would refuse to leave.”

“Nicola, I could not be prouder of you; you did incredible work!”

“You gathered a wealth of information, and we found the girls because of your clever work! You made this mission a success.”

“I suppose so.”

“So, don’t beat yourself up, son.”

“Because of you, we verified they are safe and happy, at least for now!” “So, it is not your fault they refused to leave.”

“Oh no, Sir, I’m not blaming myself for a mission failure; I’m in serious physical pain. My back and ass are black and blue from the beating one of your little dancers gave me as I carried her off.”

“I can’t even sit down. I wish I had some Turmeric.”

“Oh, Ha-ha, those gals are athletes.”

“I feel them!”

“Try keeping your buns moving to hold down the swelling.”

“I’m going to soak them in this ORPH’s hot tub after this call.”

“ORPH Six has a hot tub?”

“Oh yeah.”

“I converted its water tank (for its boiler) into a water tub. I heat it by circulating the water through the steam engine’s block.”

“When agents use it, a mechanical arm removes its lid, then stores it out of the way behind the locomotive.”

“When it is not used, the arm replaces the lid.”

“Agents can use it to relax, bathe, or exercise while rolling through the country.”

“That’s fascinating, Nicola!”

“Maybe someday all locomotives will have your hot tubs.”

“Ah, I doubt it.”

“Anyways, Lemont says you can fire lightning bolts from your fingertips.”

“It’s a trick.”

“A trick?”

“You know those snappy sparks you hear when slipping on a wool sweater?”

“Sure.”

“I use a battery to amplify them a couple of thousand times.”

“The bolts shoot from wires I have sown into my sleeves.”

“Could you shoot destructive lightning bolts at targets over great distances?”

“You mean weapons?”

“Yes.”

“I haven’t yet. But it is possible. It depends on how much electricity I can instantly discharge at limited targets.”

“Limited targets?”

“They must either have enough grounded metal or a strong negative charge.”

“We need to get all of your ideas prototyped right away.”

“I need a staff, sir.”

“We are putting that together.”

“Great!”

“At least some of those other missing girls and those big men were held at that old French fort, then shipped out of the country on boats.”

“We already suspected that.”

“Well, it’s a fact. Would you like me to explain now?”

“Not at the moment; if you are certain, so am I.”

“It is a fact, sir.”

“What I need to know right now is if you can track Lemont to an island in the Gulf with your new device?”

“Ty Cross has fast boats. If I know their destination, I can find him after they arrive. Admiral Forti is 90% certain those two men escaped from along Cuba’s southern coast.”

“How far away can you track him?”

“I consistently reach twenty miles using crystals at these frequencies. But I would prefer ten if possible.”

“That’s remarkable, son! Ten miles is still far enough for a small steamboat to hide over the horizon.”

“What do you need?”

“A small, fast civilian boat.”

“Do you want me to ask the Admiral what he has available?”

“I already have access to everything here.”

“His chief engineer owns the most ideal boat down here. He just supplemented its steam engine with a dynamo-drive system that he developed. It’s quite impressive.”

“With your dynamos?”

“Of course.”

“Steam and electric drive systems should help his boat stay close to anything. But I need your authorization to make that happen.”

“For what?”

“His boat needs a couple of hundred pounds of our nitro-muriatic batteries. Right now, it only gives full power for a few seconds; our batteries should give it 8 to 10 hours per full charge.”

“Nicola, you should still have twelve hundred pounds at Westinghouse.”

“I could have an ORPH bring the batteries. But that would take three days. We don’t have any ORPHS east of Ohio today.”

“I have a much faster idea. ORPH Six has four hundred pounds of muriatic batteries. We could borrow two hundred, then replace them when we return.”

“Will Six be operation with 200 missing pounds?”

“It won’t have full power, but it will still be faster than anything else. Its magnetic brakes should also work; they generate more electricity than they use.”

“Its weapon systems and light cannons might not operate.”

“That’s fine; go ahead and borrow them.”

“How long will it take for you to install them into that boat?”

“No time at all. I can have navy engineers switch them tonight while I connect that dynamo to the steam engine.”

“Why?”

“So, we can use steam power to recharge the batteries.”

“Do what it takes.”

“I’ll commit five days to see if they take Lemont. Don’t let anything bad happen to him.”

“I’ll give all I have!”

“I know you will.”

“I would rather not take those batteries back; they need them.”

“I could send Yeager and Cochran to New York in Six while we use Lemont as bate. George can replace the missing batteries in an hour, and ORPH Six could be back here in four days.”

“Fine, I’ll call George now so you can get to work.”

“I’ll have to keep the surgical car here; it’s my laboratory.”

“Sure, Nicola.”

“If it is ready, tell George to attach the Flight car.”

“What is the flight car?”

“We wanted it working before we told you about it.”

“What does it do?”

“It releases a folding dirigible on a 1000-foot tether.”

“It will give agents and cameras a bird’s eye view of an area or town, then a dynamo reels it back into the car.”

“That’s incredible!”

“It will do far more than just recon. It could deliver one thousand pounds of cargo to an unreachable location, like a mountain top, or inside a forest without trails.”

“It does not have to be tethered either; in mild weather, a trained pilot could fly missions several 100 miles away and then return it to the Flight car.”

“I can’t wait to see it fly!”

“I knew you would like it.”

“The biggest problem is finding agents willing to learn how to fly it.”

“Anything else, son?”

“I will make another oral tracker for Colin’s mouth tonight, just in case we get separated.”

“Could using two of those confuse tracking?”

“Not at all. I cut the crystals at different frequencies.”

“Different what?”

“Frequencies.”

“What are frequencies?”

“It refers to how many times a crystal vibrates per second. Only crystals at the same frequencies can communicate with each other. If I give each pair a different frequency, thousands of communications can coexist without interfering.”

“Wow!”

“Every federal agent could receive wireless messages from their commander.”

“It is possible that something about Lemont only lets him feel incoming codes. I will know if Colin can also do it tonight.”

“My fingers are crossed.”

“Even if he can’t, this should still be able to point out his location.”

“Fill me in on Colin’s test before meeting with the Marshal tomorrow morning.”

“If they take Lemont, Nicola, you and Colin must bring him back safely!”

“I’ll give that everything I have, sir.”

“I hope that’s enough, son.”

“Sure, ah, dad.”

“Is Lemont still there?”

“He is just outside with Wouda, eating a mountain of big red bugs.”

“No, that would be Crawdads.”

“They look like bugs to me.”

“Get him back on the telephone.”

“Yeah, Boss.”

“Are you up for this?”

“As much as I will ever be.”

“Anyways, it’s unlikely they will abduct you. But I’m committing to five days to bate them.”

“Fine.”

“Do you think Cross and his men believe federal agents tried to rescue the girls?”

“I don’t think so, Boss.”

“The girls don’t know we’re federal agents. They would honestly say that Sara’s old boyfriend came for them.”

“Cross must be pounding his head to figure out how some Yankee musician found them so rapidly.”

“No doubt about that, Boss.”

“Even that Voodoo Witch would say a boyfriend came to rescue them.”

“Evaluate the crap out of Nicola’s communication thing tonight.”

“We can’t afford it to fail.”

“We have been assessing it; he sends me messages a couple of times an hour.”

“What a great invention. I could not consider agreeing to this mission without it.”

“Me neither.”

“Tomorrow morning, Marshall Doohickey will escort you and Colin around Algiers. He said he has a fruit cart for you to push around each evening.”

“Fruit is a huge deal down here.”

“Don’t eat it all. We might need that cart for five nights.”

“Marshal Dupree’s wagon is open; I leave a large impression where I’d rather not be seen.”

“Yea, you are a sight.”

“He said he will rent a funeral coach to keep you hidden during that recon. I just wired him \$175 to rent one.”

“That should cost \$10, \$15 tops, Boss.”

“He could buy a new coach for \$175.”

“It’s fine. After hearing about that rotten wagon and old mule, I felt sorry for him.”

“They could use upgrading.”

“Call me when you return from your Algiers reconnaissance.”

“I got to go right now, son. **CLICK.**”

The old commander had to go.

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