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Nikola Tesla's White Pigeon

Nikola Tesla was obsessed with pigeons all his life and a decade before his death, claimed to be visited by a specific white pigeon daily. He viewed the inevitable death of the pigeon as the end of himself and his work.

Nikola Tesla said pigeons spoke to him. Not all pigeons, really. Just one. One in particular. A white pigeon that visited the 33rd floor window of room 3327 in The New Yorker Hotel.

Nikola Tesla had to do everything in threes, see. Threes or numbers divisible by three, and that included the floors and rooms of hotels and everything else. He would circle a block three times, tap his fingers on his breast pocket three times, shake a hand up and down three times. When he shook hands and he never shook hands. He stroked that particular white pigeon's wings three times, or patted its beak three times or said goodbye, goodbye, goodbye as it flew away. Because he was always so sad when it flew away. Watching that white pigeon fly away put Nikola Tesla in the dumps. Big time.

See, the pigeon, that particular pigeon, told him things. Secrets. It told him secrets like the meaning of life. Or how mothers knew their baby's cry from all other baby's cries. Why good things happened to bad people, why there was pain. That pigeon even gave him the key to the universe, all wrapped up in its white pigeon wings. It answered any and all the questions Nikola Tesla had. All the ones he'd been saving up since he was a little boy. Why he had visions, why his father died, why he never forgot anything and had to relive every moment over again in his sleep. He asked the pigeon to recite the Serbian poems Nikola's mother had memorized by ear and asked it why she had never learned to read. He even asked why he, Nikola Tesla, had decided in his twenties to abandon his parents and brother and sisters and travel to Marburg, where he had never been happy. He asked questions from his recent past too, like why Thomas Edison betrayed him and why people believed Albert Einstein's every word and why Mark Twain was Tesla's friend when no one else would be. He asked who really invented radio, he or Marconi and Nikola loved the pigeon for knowing. He asked and he asked and he asked and that pigeon told him why every time. And Nikola nodded and believed because the white pigeon was his Albert Einstein. He asked it three questions every day for nine years and got three answers every day for nine years until one day the pigeon did not appear. He looked and he looked and he looked, but the white pigeon was not there. And Nikola spent the afternoon drawing diagrams in his head, just waiting and waiting and waiting.

He waited three days. Waited and waited and waited. Three days and three nights and on the fourth day he knew. He knew. The pigeon was dead. Nikola Tesla knew deep down in his heart, in the folds of muscle that protected his soul, knew the white pigeon was dead and would never, ever, ever return. And Nikola was so sad. Sadder than he had ever been. Sadder than when he was told the meaning of life, and why his father died

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and why Nikola had abandoned his family. Sadder than when he held the key to the universe and knew why Mark Twain was his friend when no one else would be. Nikola Tesla was so sad he forgot to do things in threes. He sat in his chair by the window, the one he would wait in for his white pigeon to come, he sat down in that chair three inches from the wall and cried for hours and hours and when he finally looked at the clock he blinked. Once, just once. He rubbed his eyes once. Just once. He looked out the window and watched the sky and as far as Nikola was concerned it held nothing. The blue sky and the white sun and pale pink clouds, the tops of green trees, the glow of the world was nothing because he was alone with only answers. With all the answers he had ever wanted in the short time he'd existed, and now... Now there was a new question. A new question that buzzed in his brain and erased all he had wondered before and Nikola was so sad. He folded his hands and looked out at the nothing of the world, up, up, up, up at the nothing going on forever and ever and ever and ever. "Why," he said to the nothing. "Why did you go away, now when I needed you most?" And nothing answered.