

A Modern Man
by
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His laboratory was full, and Reginald Baker tried to contain the ecstasy that thrummed through his veins. He maintained his serious expression, not a hair on his moustache twitching from the suppressed urge to smile, as he brought the two metal rods together, almost, but not quite touching. Energy pulsed down his arms, raising the hairs taut and erect, as a small ball of light sparked where the two rods met.

A row of top hats nodded in their appreciation, murmured, and clapped in front of him. Reginald focused on the just barely contained point of energy and tried not to be distracted by the sound of rustling fabric from the skirts of the few brave ladies who had ventured out with their husbands, or even more unimaginably, alone. The amazing technical discoveries of their age sparked these forward-thinking women towards a previously unknown feminine independence. He gently pulled one of the rods away, a trick he had not yet seen performed, and the spark of light gently transferred to just one of the tips. As he threw his arm wide in a fast jerk, the spark flew forward. For one moment, there was an illuminated length of light, giving the impression of a much longer tool in his arm, like some archaic medieval weaponry with its thin rod handle and blade made of pure electricity.

The top hats were so impressed, several fell off, and the clapping was no longer held in a contained politeness, but improperly ecstatic. The rustling of the skirts was too much to bear, and Reginald let his arm drop as he allowed his attention to be won over by the admiring crowd.

It was a large group today. Twenty or so black top hats just like his, brown and red and salt-and-pepper beards in the same style as his own solid black one, and black suits now creased by enthusiastic clapping. The ladies' color palettes were as unique as modern fashion would permit. The dresses ranged from deep blues, to chocolate brown, to more tantalizing and reputation-ruining dark reds, only pretending to be maroon. Their hair waved up into high demure buns and only the barest hint of flesh was visible at the ends of their sleeves where they clapped. But one woman did not fit with the rest of the muted crowd.

(End of preview)

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