Ladylike Pursuits

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I smiled at myself in the mirror as Cecile finished tightening my corset and began to set my hair. My lips were full and curled up sensuously. My hair was dark against my alabaster skin. Congratulations were in order; I looked like a lady of my class should. All those hours of learning to be a proper lady had not been wasted.

Turning away from my reflection in the mirror, I set my eyes on the fashionable dress that had been delivered from the dressmaker’s just today. Apparently, Father’s money comes in handy for something more than funding experiments. The poor old man nearly had a stroke when I asked him for the dress. He had given up hope that I would ever find any interest in the proper pastimes of a lady. For years he had lamented that I spent all my time in the laboratory and not at parties in pursuit of a decent husband. Not that I had any interest in that, but I could not let anyone know what I was plotting.

Recently, a spy was discovered in my laboratory. After some aggressive questioning I found that the spy was in the employ of my childhood friend turned scientific nemesis and libertine, Edward Stein. That bombastic amateur was attempting to gather information on my latest project, a miniscule pistol with power twice its size. It symbolized the culmination of my research. Fueled by æther, it would become the weapon of choice for the cautious lady or the clandestine assassin. It was a fascinating project. I would be damned before I let that dilettante steal my work.

Cecile finished my hair and helped me into my gown, a silk aubergine fabrication. I dismissed her before I added the final touch to my outfit, a sleek, diminutive pistol that I slid down the front of my corset. It fit snuggly, lethally, against my skin. Giving myself one final, confident smile, I left for what was being lauded as the party of the year, hosted by none other than Edward Stein.

I stepped out of the car in front of the grand mansion Stein called home. I surveyed the Corinthian columns and Grecian friezes as I ascended the stairs. As I walked through the door, I was quickly engulfed in the raucous crowd, surrounded by the sounds of the party. The bubble of laughter and champagne was all around. An orchestra’s soaring chords sounded above it all, playing what I could only assume was all the rage in Paris.

Maneuvering through the crowd, I spotted the man I was looking for: Edward Stein. He was speaking to a colleague of mine, Dr. Hyde. I stopped to check my appearance in a gilt mirror. I looked as I had when I had left my house, refined yet sultry. Confident I would be able to lure that reprobate, Stein, into my plot, I turned towards the corner where there were conversing.

Stein’s shock at my approach was priceless. He went silent mid-sentence and his eyes went wide. Dr. Hyde followed his gaze. Upon seeing me, he waved me over to him.
in an excited manner, “Good evening, Artemis,” he said, “It is so wonderful to see you
out and about!”

“Good evening, Dr. Hyde,” I replied and I nodded a greeting to Stein, giving him
a flirtatious smile.

Stein recovered himself and replied, “Artemis! You look ravishing this evening,”
he savored the sentence, “It has been too long.”

“Indeed, it has,” I said, “Have you and Dr. Hyde been discussing our newest
project?”

“Indeed, we have Artemis,” Dr. Hyde said excitedly, “Why I was just telling
Edward about your pistol...”

Hyde was quickly interrupted by Stein, who asked, “Artemis, would you honor
me with a dance?”

“It would be my pleasure,” I smiled, offering him my arm.

He guided me to the floor as the orchestra began a waltz. He put his hand on my
waist, bringing us too close together to be modest and we began gliding along the
dance floor.

He smiled at me, “It has been so long since I last saw you; I had forgotten your
beauty,” he paused, “You have become a recluse. You research must be quite
engaging.”

“It is, indeed, most fascinating,” I demurred. I felt the pressure of the pistol in my
corset.

“I was quite intrigued by what Dr. Hyde told me. You must tell me more about
it.”

I realized that this could be my opportunity to get him alone. Calmly I said, “If it
fascinates you so, then I suppose I must tell you,” I looked around, smiled at him, and
suggested, “Perhaps somewhere more private,” I raised an eyebrow, knowing he would
understand.

Stein’s eyes lit up and he led me off the dance floor, through the partiers,
towards his private rooms. He made certain that no one saw us leave. A laugh nearly
burst from my lips at the thought of this well-known libertine attempting to protect my
honor.

Quietly, Stein opened the door to his room and secreted me inside. He turned the
lock before turning to me saying, “Who says a woman cannot be beautiful and smart?”

He moved towards me, grabbing me by the waist. I felt the soft pressure of his
lips on mine and I let him lead me backwards towards his bed. My plan was working.

He pulled away and began to fiddle with his bowtie and unbutton his shirt. My
brain sent my body into action, here was my chance. Quickly, I reached into my corset
and pulled out the object that Stein was so interested in. Looking up he saw the tiny
weapon in my hand.

He did not comprehend it at first, “You never do leave the laboratory do you,
Artemis,” he questioned.

“You were so keen on it, Edward, that I thought you might like to see it in
action,” the words seethed with venom and fear came across his face.
No one heard a thing over the orchestra and the bubble of champagne. I returned to the party to find Hyde glancing around, searching for someone among the revelers. “Artemis! There you are. I was just looking for you. Where have you been?” he queried.

“Dancing,” I answered, “The orchestra is glorious this evening.”
He asked me one last question, before I excused myself to enjoy a few dances before heading back to my laboratory, “Have you seen Edward?”
“Not since our waltz,” I answered coolly and moved away to join next dance.