

The Harlem Dancer

Claude McKay

Applauding youths laughed with young prostitutes
 And watched her perfect, half-clothed body sway;
 Her voice was like the sound of blended flutes
 Blown by black players upon a picnic day.
 5 She sang and danced on gracefully and calm,
 The light gauze hanging loose about her form;
 To me she seemed a proudly-swaying palm
 Grown lovelier for passing through a storm.
 Upon her swarthy neck black shiny curls
 10 Luxuriant fell; and tossing coins in praise,
 The wine-flushed, bold-eyed boys, and even the girls,
 Devoured her shape with eager, passionate gaze;
 But looking at her falsely-smiling face,
 I knew her self was not in that strange place.

Textual Note

This poem also appeared in:

- *The Seven Arts* (October, 1917) with “Invocation”, presented as “Two Sonnets” by Eli Edwards.
- *Spring in New Hampshire* (1920)

9 black] , *add. Sev., Spr.*

10 Luxuriant] Profusely *Sev., Spr.*

10 and] , *add. Sev., Spr.*

12 shape] *om. Sev., Spr.*

12 ;] : *Sev., Spr.*

13 But] , *add. Sev., Spr.*