

Based on the Poem, "The Harlem Dancer"

by

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The smell of cheap perfume and booze jolts her mind as she escapes the lobby and into Harlem's winter air. Reality hasn't caught up to her yet. Her daze is stuck on the nightlife of the city. One of those lives being Mr. Elms'. As he sat across the street from the gentlemen's club she grew sad and almost curious as to how his wits make him too proud to beg, yet, he continued to be himself while covered and taunted by his melanin. He was never a grouchy old man, rather, a human who demanded respect with disregard to skin color. Therefore, when a younger man stepped on Mr. Elms blanket before stepping out onto the street, she wasn't surprised when he was gracefully called back by the older gentleman. Her eyes didn't let go of the encounter, which ended in the young man handing Mr. Elms a quarter before it was kindly rejected in exchange for a firm handshake. Remembering that she was not accustomed to such pride and was much too broke to dignify herself, she awoke from her daze. When the young man finally crossed the street and made it to his intended destination she lost her last thoughts and followed.

It didn't take long for the smell of gin to exude out of her skin and mouth. She enjoyed this, or at the very least, she enjoyed knowing that her last three shots were going to force the smile on her face and leave it there all night. She made herself a comfortable spot behind the curtains, waiting for the next act. It was better than waiting in the back room with the other teasers. She loved the workers. After all, they were a reflection of herself. However, the white collars who slipped a crisp twenty in the owners pocket to get a sneak peek of the changing room was an encounter that she worked hard to avoid. Even worse, on a slow night, the suit may even get to touch skin. She was never a victim and never would be, as long as she stayed behind the curtain, only showing face when necessary before hiding behind the gauze again.

Now, two inches higher than herself, the drunken applause caused her to lower her head. Shiny, brown curls fall against her bosom and back. The night got busier as each purchase of booze meant another standing ovation. Her heels clicked against the stage. No amount of lights could blind her from the innumerable ties she saw at the candle-lit tables. It was at this time that everyone became as equals through a simultaneous presence. The shame is left onto the street; all they have is each other. Therefore, she would give the people what they wanted, understanding that everybody is here to compensate for something else. She moved for the people; alike to her own person. A mask covered the top half of her face, highlighting a bright smile as eyes fixated on the curve of her figure. The leg routine was the best part. How she slid her dress up slowly enough to reveal a hint of her ankles and gradually removing the bottoms to ultimately reveal her dark tone in its entirety. The corset leotard hugs her tight, accentuating everything under. Without any consideration of her self-worth from either side, coins are tossed from the back row and onto the platform. She has no choice but to take the tiny hits. She knows that tolerating a penny being plucked in her eye is better than the hard winds stinging her skin for the next three months, so she goes along and does not stop. With only two minutes left, she is prepared to make

a lasting impression, resulting in a big financial reward. The crowd erupts in shouting and swearing as her legs kick so high into the air, it is impossible for what is in between to go unnoticed. If the corset wasn't as tight, she would have lost her balance while trying to dance on top of the loose change in high heels. She extended every line her body possessed making the crowd stop with an amazing stare, eager for the next trick. She knew very well that they hated to see her go. Giving them something to remember, something so unique, is what made them sneak through the front doors every night. If she brought the dances, and the men brought their wallets, nothing bothered her. At least, until the performance was over. Like any other night she worked up the courage to leave her name on stage and take the money. The crowd didn't think she could do more than what was done until finally, after playing the role of the mysterious woman with endless sex appeal, she took off her mask. Men's eyes grew bold as well as some women. It was inevitable to become mesmerized by the beauty of the swarthy facial structure. One onlookers' overwhelming amazement caused him to flip out of his chair, which didn't seem to distract anyone from the art piece on stage.

The phony smile lasted long enough. The applause died down. She gathered every coin until the stage was clear. Her hands flooded with pennies, nickels, and dimes. Sadness grew heavy in her as she shrunk back into her true self. A man caught her before the curtains closed and attached her lips to his. It was quick but powerful. He proceeded to pull a dollar out of his pocket and hold it out for her to take. She accepted it with a quick hesitation, as they walked with shoulders touching, together and out of sight.