

## THE DANCER

*Ficke, Arthur Davison, 1883-1945*

They were godly people, all of them,  
With whom I dined  
In the cafe that night—  
Substantial citizens  
With their virtuous wives  
And a stray daughter or two. . . .  
And when I spoke my admiration of your dancing,—  
You, the little half-clothed painted cabaret performer  
Who was pirouetting before us,—  
I received a curious answer.—  
It was only as the absurd voicing  
Of a preposterous fancy  
That one of the virtuous wives said to me—  
"Why don't you go over and dance with her yourself!"  
Her voice stung me,—it was so sure  
That to dance with you would be a shameful and unpleasant thing.  
So I answered crossly— "For a nickel I would."  
And one of the daughters,  
Who doubtless suffered later for her evil act,  
Handed me the nickel. . . . .

And that was how it came to be  
That you and I  
Before the gaping herd of my respectable fellow-townsmen  
Forgot the world.  
Light was the pressure of your hand  
And your body was as answering to my touch  
As is a little willow to the wind.  
I could not see your painted face against my shoulder;  
forgot that you were clad in veils to lure the lustful crowd;  
The tawdry glitter of the hour faded and died  
As you and I soared up  
Upon the music.  
O soul of a bird!  
O cooling wind from the mountains of wild laurel!  
O dreamer of a pattern of whirling stars  
Down which we moved  
In dizzy orbits!  
Perfumes of Arabia were around us;  
Tremulous melody heard by none other  
Out of some distant garden poured in wild song.

And there were lights in the air;  
And there were memories  
Of forgotten Thracian hillsides,  
And madness, and oblivion,  
And a fierce white peace.

Then the dance ended. . . .  
And you were once more a little painted harlot  
In an ugly cafe  
Before a vulgar audience.  
So I led you back to your table  
And thanked you conventionally,  
And turned to go.— But a sudden impulse  
Swept me.—  
And in the sight of all the gaping respectabilities  
I turned to you again  
And kissed you  
In recognition and farewell  
To that winged spirit which you late had been.