

Spanish Dancer

As a wooden match held in the hand, white,
on all its sides shoots flickering tongues
before it flashes into flame—: within the inner
circle of onlookers, hurried, hot, bright,
her dance in rounds begins to flicker and spread.

And suddenly, everything is completely fire.

One glance and she ignites her hair,
turning all at once with daring art
her entire dress into a passion of flame,
from which, like startled snakes,
the naked arms awake and reach out, clapping.

And then: as if the fire were growing too tight,
she takes it together and throws it off,
masterfully, with proud, imperious gestures,
and watches: it lies there raging on the ground,
still flaring up, refusing to give in—.
Till triumphantly, self-assured and with a sweet
welcoming smile, she raises her face,
then stamps it out with small, powerful feet.

Rainer Maria Rilke (tr. Cliff Crego)