

IN MANU DOMINÆ  
(A BLACK MASS)

*To Anna Grossmann*

THE pale girl with the glittering eyes  
    Leans forward ; all her youth's despair  
Stares from the fleshless face that lies  
    'Mid the faint flax of her hair  
Fallen on her foolish 'broideries :  
    She is too deathly fair.

She stares—she stares—she reads this thought,  
    What black joy her harsh cough affirms.  
Life leers—a jesting Juggernaut !  
    Death beckons, beckons to the worms.  
And the smile upon his face is fraught  
    With all its ghastly terms.

Out of the glimmer and incense-reek  
    Two clamorous colour-cries emerge.  
The frightful flush that stains her cheek  
    Is the rouge of the White Scourge ;  
Her pallor is like a spectre sleek  
    That dances to a dirge.

Her slim transparent hand is wan  
    As a moonstone, as blue ice !  
She hath divers jewels crusted on  
    To her rings' graven obscenities,  
Like elfin eyes, the malison  
    Of a basilisk cockatrice !

She hath a cold, an ardent gleam  
    In the staring eyes of her ;

She weaves a witch-web of dank dream  
    Before her worshipper ;  
Her hand allures him to its theme :  
    Sceptre to sepulchre !

So cold, so chaste, so sombre glows  
    The purpose of her cypress glance !  
A sphinx set up amid the snows,  
    An Attis frozen in his dance,  
Is this unnatural god that knows  
    No man's inheritance.

So with a strange Circean smile  
    She bends herself and moves  
With a vile, a calculated wile  
    In the unfamiliar grooves,  
Whose horror hath so great a guile  
    That her hates pass for loves.

Within the gold bars of her rings  
    She grips the god as in a vice.  
She watches every twinge that wrings  
    The heart of the struggling sacrifice,  
Lest she should lose the joy that stings,  
    The furies that entice.

Slower and firmer and steadier !  
    Relentless, ruthless, still she sways ;  
And the snake-cold stealth and hate of her  
    Flash in the jewels, and bite, and blaze ;  
While the mystic hand, her minister,  
    Moves in its fatal ways.

The victim twists and writhes beneath  
    The scornful spell, the giant grip.  
He rolls his eyes, he grinds his teeth

Like a slave under the whip ;  
And his tortured groans can only wreathe  
A sneer upon her lip.

In the half-light her jewels flame  
Like stars that presage pestilence.  
O laughterless, O hideous game  
Of sterile smiles, of cold incense !  
Her death's-head grins the gargoye shame  
Of her virile virulence.

Now let the slave gasp out his soul  
In the agony supreme !  
She laughs outright as she gains the goal  
Of her dark and deadly dream ;  
And the white life leaps from his control  
Wild, in a choking scream.

She curves white lips to a cup of death ;  
Her eyes gleam, and her wise brows nod ;  
Her hand makes music with her breath  
Dancing upon the ivory rod—  
The dying priestess offereth  
The sacrifice to God