

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