

ERNEST DOWSON

“Ad Manus Puellae” [To a Girl’s Hands] (1893)

I was always a lover of ladies’ hands!
Or ever mine heart came here to tryst,
For the sake of your carved white hands’ commands;
The tapering fingers, the dainty wrist;
The hands of a girl were what I kissed.

I remember an hand like a *fleur-de-lys*
When it slid from its silken cheese, her glove;
With its odours passing ambergris:
And that was the empty husk of a love.
Oh, how shall I kiss your hands enough?

They are pale with the pallor of ivories;
But they blush to the tips like a curled sea-shell:
What treasure, in kingly treasures,
Of gold, and spice for the thurible,
Is sweet as her hands to hoard and tell?

I know not the way from your finger-tips,
Nor how I shall gain the higher lands,
The citadel of your sacred lips:
I am captive still of my pleasant bands,
The hands of a girl, and most your hands.