

A MOURNING STROLL

She paced the crowded pavement in the sun,
With slowly leisured yet deliberate steps,
Stark in the startling black of widow's weeds;
No sackcloth these, but costly stylish stuff,
Suitably suited, fashioned fashionably,
Perfectly fitting, fitted her perfectly;
Hat, coat, skirt, stockings, shoes, handbag, and gloves,
Jet-black defiantly from head to foot;
Reminder of mankind's mortality,
And womankind's survival yet awhile

I watched her lone procession down the street
As if she led invisible cortege;
Blank face, veiled not with lace but vacancy,
As shoppers shrank away, drawing aside
As if they were contagiously at risk
From one who bragged her recent brush with death,
Grave witness to the quick, the not quite dead,
That, though their sun shone bright, black night would fall.
Yet sympathy they showed, and this I shared,
Until I wondered - as, alas, my wont! -
How she had managed at the last to be
Meticulously tailored so to wear
Her widowhood with such unwonted grace
To greet the quaint and grisly obsequies
Which mark the final measure of a man.
Or had she, when surprised by suddenness which her
Happiness had come to grief,
Made dowdy do with sadly sombre frock,
Until, belatedly, the costume came
Which she could wear to stage this mourning stroll;

Or, scene more sinister, had she assumed,
Some weeks, nay months before, his dwindling days;
And so prepared, even thus down to earth,
So modishly to fend for funeral,
To follow in the wake of him who slept ?

Not churlish, still I wonder why she chose
To stride the staring world so willingly,
So wilfully ensuring she should be
The cynosure of wise or wondering eyes,
In full, nay, fulsome mourning famously,
By which, say what you will, she did him proud

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