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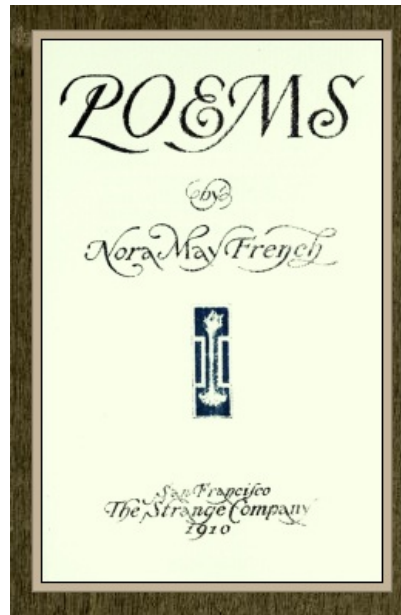
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**P O E M S**



*Nora May French*

# POEMS



*Nora May French*



*San Francisco*  
*The Strange Company*  
1910

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BY THE STRANGE COMPANY

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**NORA MAY FRENCH WAS BORN  
AT AURORA, NEW YORK, APRIL  
THE TWENTY-SIXTH, 1881, AND  
DIED AT CARMEL, CALIFORNIA,  
NOVEMBER THE FOURTEENTH,  
1907, AGED TWENTY-SIX YEARS**

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**L**IFE said: "My house is thine with all its store;  
Behold, I open shining ways to thee—  
Of every inner portal make thee free:  
O child, I may not bar the outer door.  
Go from me if thou wilt, to come no more;  
But all thy pain is mine, thy flesh of me;  
And must I hear thee, faint and woefully,  
Call on me from the darkness and implore?"

Nay, mother, for I follow at thy will.  
But oftentimes thy voice is sharp to hear,  
Thy trailing fragrance heavy on the breath;  
Always the outer hall is very still,  
And on my face a pleasant wind and clear  
Blows straitly from the narrow gate of Death.

## RAIN

**T**HE rain was grey before it fell,  
And through a world where light had died  
There ran a mournful little wind  
That shook the trees and cried.

The rain was brown upon the earth,  
In turbid stream and tiny seas—  
In swift and slender shafts that beat  
The flowers to their knees.

The rain is mirror to the sky,  
To leaning grass in image clear,  
And drifting in the shining pools  
The clouds are white and near.

## BEST-LOVED

**I**T was a joy whose stem I did not break—  
A little thing I passed with crowded hands,  
And gave a backward look for beauty's sake.

Of all I pulled and wove and flung aside,  
Was any hue preferred above the rest?  
I only know they pleased me well, and died.

But this—it lives distinct in Memory's sight,  
A little thing, incurving like a pearl.  
I think its heart had never seen the light.

## THE ROSE<sup>[2]</sup>

**A**Y, pluck a jonquil when the May's a-wing!  
Or please you with a rose upon the breast,  
A sweeter violet chosen from the rest,  
To match your mood with blue caprice of spring—  
Leave windy vines a tendril less to swing.  
Why, what's a flower? A day's delight at best,  
A perfume loved, a faded petal pressed,  
A whimsey for an hour's remembering.

But wondrous careful must he draw the rose  
From jealous earth, who seeks to set anew  
Deep root, young leafage, with a gardener's art—  
To plant her queen of all his garden close,  
And make his varying fancy wind and dew,  
Cloud, rain, and sunshine for one woman's heart.

## BETWEEN TWO RAINS

**I**T is a silver space between two rains;  
The lulling storm has given to the day  
An hour of windless air and riven grey;  
The world is drained of color; light remains.  
Beyond the curving shore a gull complains;  
Unceasing, on the bastions of the bay,  
With gleam of shields and veer of vapping spray  
The long seas fall, the grey tide wars and wanes.

It is a silver space between two rains:  
A mood too sweet for tears, for joy too pale—  
What stress has swept or nears us, thou and I?  
This hour a mist of light is on the plains,  
And seaward fares again with litten sail  
Our laden ship of dreams adown the sky.

## THE MESSAGE<sup>[3]</sup>

**S**o might it brush my cheek with errant wings,  
So might it speak with thrilling touch and light  
Of answering eyes, of dim, unuttered things—  
A moth from hidden gardens of the night.

So, in a land of hills, where twilight lay,  
Might come a sudden bird-call to the ear,  
Across the canyons, faint and far away....  
O Heart, how sweet ... half heard and wholly dear.

## BY THE HOSPITAL

**W**HO goes to meet the windy night  
With unseen comrades shouting by,  
Who grips a bough in swift delight  
To let it dip and loose and fly;

Who runs for rest that running gives,  
Runs till his throbbing muscles speak;  
Who bends to feel how keenly lives  
The joyous grass beneath his cheek—

With sudden tears his eyes shall fill,  
With quick-drawn breath he sees them plain—  
Those bodies that must lie so still,  
So tired—in the House of Pain.

## “OH, DRYAD THOUGHTS”

**O**H, Dryad thoughts of lovely yesterday!—  
You melted through a sunny wood like mist,  
With here a wind of laughter, there a stray  
Pleased flower, tipped and kissed.

To-day among the noises of the street,  
The press of faces, sullen, gay, and wise,  
I hear you calling, calling me; I meet  
Your clear, untroubled eyes.

## MUSIC IN THE PAVILION

**F**ACES that throng and stare and come and go—  
The air a-quiver as the voices meet;  
And loud Humanity in mingled flow  
Passes with jarring tread of many feet.

But over all the chatter of the crowd  
(The background for its delicate relief)  
Now trembling in a thread, now wild and loud,  
The violin laughs and sings, and cries its grief.

Then, through it all, and round it all, the sea;  
A solemn heart with never-ceasing beat,  
Bearing an undertone of mystery  
The harsh and lovely notes, the shrill and sweet.

Surely it is my life—of plodding days,  
With one Ideal holding clear and good;  
And sounding over, under, through my ways,  
Something apart—and never understood.

## REBUKE

**T**HE tortured river-banks, the toiling piers—  
I walked thereby as older grew the day,  
And sick with sorry clamor in mine ears,  
Heart-weary turned my steps and went my way.

“O place full-voiced of wretchedness!” I cried.  
(The sun had set, the dusk was closing in)  
“O place where laboring Life goes heavy-eyed,  
Compound of grime and discord, strife and sin!”

I turned me back, and lo, a miracle!  
For misty violet lay along the land.  
The shining river in mysterious spell  
(Divinely touched by some transmuting hand).

A path of wonder was, and on it stirred,  
(Black-shaped, and jeweled with a crimson spark)  
A ship that slowly moved; and, faintly heard,  
A cheery song rose blithely to the dark.

## IN CAMP

### I

**A**S down I bent with eager lips  
Above the stones and cresses cool—  
The yellow tent, the little moon,  
I found within my twilight pool.

The fringing trees, the floating moon,  
The bubble tent—I passed them by,  
And sipped a tiny, shattered star,  
Deep drinking from that mirrored sky.

### II

**M**Y tent is shadowed day and night  
With leaves that shift in moon and sun;  
Across its walls of lucent white  
The lovely varied tracings run;

And black and slender, quickly sped,  
I watch the little feet at dawn—  
A sudden oriole overhead,  
A darting linnet come and gone.

## THE NYMPH

**F**ROM forest paths we turned us, nymphs, new-made,  
And, lifting eyes abashed with great desire  
Before high Jove, the gift of souls we prayed.

Whereat he said: "O perfect as new leaves  
New glossed and veined with blood of perfect days  
And stirred to murmured speech in fragrant eves,

"Still ask ye souls? Behold, I give instead  
Into each breast a bird with fettered wings,  
A bird fast holden with a silken thread:

"To fall from trial of flight with strength swift spent,  
To sing of mating and the brooding grass,  
To turn thy being earthward to content."

Within me sudden wrath and terror strove,  
And, casting forth his gift I cried aloud:  
"I pray thee for a soul in truth, great Jove!"

Then smiled he slowly, lifting to my look  
A fabric where the rippled lustre played  
And shifted like the humor of a brook—

All prism-hued, as upward eyes may see  
The sun through dazzled lashes. Straight I cried:  
"I know not this!" "Thy soul," he answered me.

But when my joy had seized it, "Nay," he said,  
And cast it gleaming to the scattering wind—  
Hues green and golden, blue and fervent red.

Within his hand the brightest shred of all—  
The very heart and secret of the web—  
That held he fast and loosed he not at all;

But to me said: "O thou who scorned the dole  
That gave thee peace of days and long content,  
Do now *my* will. Go forth and find thy soul."

To earth we went, nor knew I from that hour  
My sister's joy or pain; but on great morns  
When low light slept above a world in flower,

Through drowsing noons where heat and color lie  
In ever wavering tides of airy seas,  
Winged by the darting ships of dragon-flies—

Through these and twilight peace I went, and rid  
My steps of comrades. Lonely must I find  
The silent places where my soul was hid.

In sheltered ways with summer showers sweet  
I wandered on a day, and singing found  
The very green I sought beneath my feet.

In leafing forests when the year was new,  
And heaven ribboned in the crossing boughs,  
I gathered marvelous strip on strip of blue.

When on a lonely stream the moon was bright,

A Naiad from her treasure plucked me forth  
Such gold as bound my web with threads of light.

And red. Ah, love! thou knowest how I came  
Unto thy fluting in the breathless eve,  
And burned my heart's pale flower to scarlet flame!...

One morn I found within a drop of dew  
My very soul: a crystal world it was  
Wherein the varied earth and heaven's blue

And myself gazing glassed in perfect sphere—  
But long above it was my wonder bent,  
And lo! it dried more swiftly than a tear.

Now is this truth, O Jove, that I have won  
And woven all the shreds thou gav'st the wind?  
But how, I pray thee, can my task be done

Unless thou ope thine hand, unless thou loose  
The very heart and secret of the web  
Where every thread may end and know its use?

Joy hast thou not withheld, nor love denied,  
Nor any beauty dimmed on earth or sky,  
Yet by thy will I roam unsatisfied.

But couldst thou hear again that earliest plea,  
Again my choice would flout the lesser gift,  
And willing take this task thou grantest me—

To search the heart and secret of the whole,  
To twine the eager hues of varied days,  
And to its bright perfection weave a soul.

## VIVISECTION

**WE** saw unpitying skill  
In curious hands put living flesh apart,  
Till, bare and terrible, the tiny heart  
Pulsed, and was still.

We saw Grief's sudden knife  
Strip through the pleasant flesh of soul-disguise—  
Lay for a second's space before our eyes  
A naked life.

## THE STRANGER

**SHE** sat so quiet day by day,  
The sweet withdrawal of a nun,  
With busy hands and downward eyes—  
The shyest thing beneath the sun.

Nor knew we, tossing each to each  
Our rapid speech, our careless words,  
That through them, always, half-afraid,  
Her thoughts had gone like seeking birds,

Plucking a twig, a shining straw,  
A happy thread with silken gleams,  
To carry homeward to her heart,  
And weave a hidden nest of dreams.

## THE CONSTANT ONES



**T**HE tossing trees had every flag unfurled  
To hail their chief, but now the sun is set,  
And in the sweet new quiet on the world  
The king is dead, the fickle leaves forget.

A placid earth, an air serene and still;  
In misty blue the gradual smoke is thinned—  
Only the grasses, leaning to his will,  
The grasses hold a memory of wind.

## INSTINCT

**T**O Reason with the praise of one I go  
To fall back, silent, at her whispered "No."

And always of the other says she, "Trust—  
He doeth thus and thus, O thou unjust!"

Yet meet one eye to eye and queries end—  
An eager hand goes out to greet a friend,

And let the other please me, soon or late  
Wakes with a hiss the little snake of hate.

## SAN FRANCISCO NEW YEAR'S, 1907

**S**AID the Old Year to the New: "They will never welcome you  
As they sang me in and rang me in upon my birthday night—  
All above the surging crowd, bells and voices calling loud—  
A throng attuned to laughter and a city all alight.

"Kind had been the years of old, drowsy-lidded, zoned with gold;  
They swept their purples down the bay and sped the homeward keel;  
The years of fruits and peace, smiling days and rich increase—  
Too indolent with wine and sun to grasp the slaying steel.

"As my brothers so I came, panther-treading, silken, tame;  
The sword was light within my hand, I kept it sheathed and still—  
The jeweled city prayed me and the laughing voices stayed me—  
A little while I pleased them well and gave them all their will.

"As a panther strikes to slay, so I wrenched my shuddering prey.  
I lit above the panic throng my torches' crimson flare;  
For they made my coming bright and I gave them light for light—  
I filled the night with flaming wings and Terror's streaming hair.

"They were stately walls and high—as I felled them so they lie—  
Lie like bodies torn and broken, lie like faces seamed with scars;  
Here where Beauty dwelt and Pride, ere my torches flamed and died,  
The empty arches break the night to frame the tranquil stars.

"Though of all my brothers scorned, I, betrayer, go unmourned,  
It is I who tower shoulder-high above the level years;  
You who come to build anew, joy will live again with you,  
But mightiest I who walked with Death and taught the sting of tears!"

## THE POPPY FIELD

**B**EYOND the tangled poppies lies a lake;  
And ever sings to him who muses here  
The murmur of the hidden streams and clear  
That flow thereto by arching fern and brake.  
But never, slumber-heavy, does he wake  
To heed the music calling in his ear,  
Nor ever knows the water, deep and near,  
Ashine with silver lilies for his sake.

And never he will heed, that love of thine;  
The poppies of thy beauty drug his sleep;  
Nor heedest thou that I must hear the streams,  
And follow all thy crystal thought and fine,  
And love at last the lilies folded deep  
Within thy soul's unknown beyond his dreams.

## YOU

**A**LL elfish woodland things that Fancy broods—  
The comrades of my solitary moods—  
Would crouch when heavy footsteps passed them by,  
And peer from shelter—freakish folk and shy.

At you they pricked their furry ears in doubt;  
Then, "This one sees—he knows!" they cried.  
"Come out!"  
They thought to hush their piping till you passed.  
"Come out!" they cried. "We dare be brave at last!"

So forth the gay procession sways and weaves;  
And some are crowned with roses, some with leaves,  
And all are mine, but some I never knew.  
I could not wake them, but they come for you.

## JUST A DOG<sup>[4]</sup>

**S**o many times in those dark days,  
Instinct with sudden hope he crept,  
(When sad, infrequent hands would raise  
The startled notes where sound had slept)  
Seeking the voice he used to hear,  
Close-crouching at his master's knees,  
Hoping to find again the dear  
Familiar hand upon the keys.

In very truth there was a soul  
Behind his brown and faithful eyes.  
There live some mortals, on the whole  
Less loving, tender, loyal, wise;  
And though we give it to decay,  
His poor old body, worn and scarred;  
Yet He who judges soul and clay  
Will give one dog his just reward.

And that would be to let him come  
Toward dim-heard music, far and sweet;  
Seeking with eyes rejoiced and dumb;  
Seeking with swift, unerring feet,  
With love supreme to guide him true,  
Across the misty ways of space,—  
Until he found the one he knew,  
And looked into his master's face.

## MIRAGE<sup>[5]</sup>

**I** SEE upon the desert's yellow rim,  
Beyond the trodden sand and herbage white  
Of level noon intolerably bright,  
A purple lure of love divine and dim.  
I hasten toward the fronded palm trees slim—  
The fountains of the city of delight—  
And stand bewildered to my heart's despite  
In empty plains where hot horizons swim.

Will I who love the vision gain at last  
For very love of love the city's gates?  
I, weary, desert-wandering, knowing this:  
That waiting me the golden doors are fast,  
And fathom-deep in dream the Princess waits,  
Her curving mouth uplifted for the kiss.

## DUSK

**E**ARTH's parchèd lips  
Drink coolness once again, for daylight dies.  
The young moon dips,  
A threaded gleam where sunset languid lies,  
And slowly twilight opens starry eyes.

Low in the West  
Day's fading embers cast a last faint glow  
Behind a crest  
Where curving hills on primrose paleness show  
Sharp-lined in jet. Dusk stillness broods below.

A first long sigh  
Stirs from the broad and dew-wet breast of night.  
The leaves reply  
With soft small rustling, moths take ghostly flight,  
And waking crickets shrill long-drawn delight.

## THE SPANISH GIRL

### PART I

#### I THE VINE

**T**o screen this depth of shade that sleeps,  
Beyond the garden's shine,  
On José's careful strings there creeps  
A little slender vine.

José is kind ... but age is cold:  
My laughter meets his sigh.  
The house is old, the garden old—  
Oh, young, the vine and I!

I love the web of light it weaves  
Across my half-drawn thread;  
It's speech to me of waking leaves,  
While José hears his Dead.

So, ever reaching, tendrils-fine,  
My eager visions run;  
So, as the long day passes, twine  
My thoughts, shot through with sun.

## THE CHAPEL

**T**HE vanished women of my race,  
The daughters of a moldering year,  
Set often in this quiet place  
Their votive tapers burning clear.

The patient waxen wreaths they wove,  
They hung before the Virgin's shrine;  
To them it was a work of love,  
José decrees it task of mine!

They glimmer where a portrait swings—  
Women as proud and white as death—  
Ah, they could mold those lifeless things;  
They had no blood, they had no breath.

“For holiness and meekness strive”  
(José would have me pray their prayers).  
Now, Mary, warm and all alive,  
You shall not think me child of theirs.

So many waxen prayers you heard!  
If I should heap your altar high  
With boughs that knew the nesting bird,  
With flowers that bloomed against the sky,

And let my wondering soul ascend  
In vivid question, swift surmise—  
I think your shadowy face would bend,  
And look at me with startled eyes.

## III

## THE GARDEN

**T**HEY planted lilies where they might,  
A drift of Vestals slim and tall,  
That lined these winding paths with white,  
That filled the court from wall to wall.

They shrank from savage, splendid heat,  
As from their teasing fires of Hell—  
Only when morns and eves were sweet  
They walked and liked their garden well.

Slow moving through a pallid mist,  
Always in black, in black they came,  
With busy rosary on wrist ...  
And all the summer world aflame!

I planted flowers that know the sun,  
I brought them in from field and stream,  
I passed not by the smallest one  
That pleased me with a yellow gleam;  
Then in a hidden chest I found  
The marvel of an old brocade—  
Strange figures on an azure ground,  
With threads of crimson overlaid,

And when the noon is fierce and bright,  
Along the garden, fold on fold,  
My silken splendor like a light  
I trail between the aisles of gold.

## IV

**A**CROSS José's unending drone  
(Some ancient tale of arms and doom)  
There came a poignant sweetness blown  
From sleeping leagues of orange bloom.

And lo! the steady candles blurred  
Like shining fishes in a net,  
And José's kindly voice I heard—  
"But little one, thine eyes are wet."

He vowed the tale had made me weep,  
Its shadowy woes in courtly speech,  
Nor knew they passed like wraiths of sleep  
The heart a vagrant wind could reach.

How can I tell, whose fancy floats  
As swift and passionate impulse veers,  
What gust may sweep its roseleaf boats  
Adown a sudden tide of tears?

V

**W**HERE man has marred and nature yields,  
And never plant nor beast is free,  
Along the tame and trampled fields  
An old unrest has followed me.

Now walk alone the night and I  
On foaming reaches curving stark,  
And battling with a windy sky  
The stormy moon is bright and dark.

Facing the sea with streaming hair,  
My broken singing flung behind,  
Whipped by the keen exultant air  
Till lips must close and eyes are blind,

Loving the sharp and cruel spray,  
The great waves thundering, might on might,  
The pagan heart must shout and sway,  
Tossed in the passion of the night.

VI

**O**H, never wings the Sisters chide,  
Wild upward wings that shine and blur,  
Nor mourn they winds of eventide  
That bid the rhythmic garden stir,

And yet this life I cannot still,  
This winged and restless strength of flight,  
That swings me down a singing hill  
Or answers to the calling night,

They curb when I would dance, would dance!  
By all the graven Saints, it seems  
Most strange they make for my mischance  
No grim confessional of dreams!

The flower of Heart's Desire is sown  
In fields unknown to waking sight,  
Down glittering spaces, all alone  
I whirl the fire of my delight—

Then, on the music's ebb and flow,  
Pause as a poisoning bird is hung,  
With supple body swaying slow,  
With parted lips and arms up-flung.

**A**LWAYS of Heaven the Sisters tell,  
 Although of earth I question most—  
 I would I knew the world as well  
 As Peter and the Angel host!

José may journey, never I.  
 In all the lonely hours I spend  
 He bids me tell my beads and sigh....  
 I wonder if the Saints attend?

For when the moon is small and thin,  
 And night is fragrant on the land,  
 The earth and I are so akin  
 I think no Saint could understand.

Something within me sleeps by day;  
 To moon and wind its petals part....  
 It is not for my soul I pray;  
 Ah Virgin!—for my untried heart.

## PART II

### I

This weak and silken love that meshes me  
 Break strand from strand, O branches of the hill!  
 Brave wind that whips me breathless, tear me free!  
 The witch's cobweb clings and shivers still.

Now ferns there were, and fretted sun above:  
 I plunged me where the silver water fell,  
 But could not drown the little singing love—  
 The little love that murmured like a shell.

Swift, swift, to drink my freedom at its flood,  
 I ran with flying feet and lips apart,  
 But love was wilder than my leaping blood—  
 Ah, louder than the beating of my heart.

### II

**I** MUST not yield ... but if he would not sing!  
 My stilling hands upon my breast can feel  
 Its answer tremble like a muted string.  
 Below the vaulted window where I kneel.

He sings, he sings, to stars and listening skies.  
 A white and haunted place my garden seems.—  
 I see the pleading beauty of his eyes  
 As faces glimmer in a pool of dreams.

So wooing wind might sweep a harp awake.  
 (Oh, muting fingers on each quivering string!)  
 I must not yield ... I think my heart will break.  
 Mother of Heaven, if he would not sing!

### III

**N**OW bending like a windy stem I strive,  
Yet ever onward, step by step, descend.  
The silence is a threat, the dark alive,  
And love how far, how far, my journey's end.

It is the girlhood dream I leave behind,  
And sweeter vision never witched a maid.  
Into the threatening shades I wander blind:  
Ah, Mary, help me now! I am afraid.

Yet with my fears I sway and follow still;  
The doorway gleams, the pleading magic charms,  
Step after step, with fluttering breath and will—  
Step after step ... at last ... into his arms.

#### IV

**B**EYOND this purple shadow glows  
My golden garden loud with bees,  
And windy grey and silver flows  
Along the slopes of olive trees.

Before a sleeping flower uncurled,  
Before the early winds were born,  
I woke for joy in such a world,  
And with the linnets shared the morn.

Remembering love, I woke and smiled,  
And heard the morning linnets sing,  
And sang for love, and they for wild  
Delight of song and sun and spring.

#### V

**S**URELY a brightness moves with me,  
For José gazes long and sighs,  
Above the pages dim to see  
For ghosts of youth that brush his eyes.

And gazing long, old Marta said:  
"Some new device has made thee fair,  
Yet have I often seen these red  
Pomegranate flowers against thy hair."

I would not have them understand  
The hidden thoughts that give me grace,  
Nor guess the lights that dreams have fanned,  
And read their shining in my face.

But all my heart the Virgin knows.  
Before her eyes, so wise they were,  
I laid my secret like a rose:  
"Mother, I love!" I cried to her.

#### VI

**I** HAD no more imagined love  
Than dreams the moonflower of its blue.  
What sun that warmed its shielding glove,—  
What long blind eve that gave it dew,

Could tell that hueless folded thing  
Of shining texture silken-loomed,  
Or say what marveling birds would sing  
The morning that it thrilled and bloomed?

Always it knew in groping thought  
Some end would come, some bloom must be,  
The blind fulfilment that it wrought  
Was strained from darkness restlessly;

Till exquisite completion willed  
The answered bud, the dream put by,  
And left the flower all sunned, and stilled  
With sudden wonder of the sky.

## VII

**M**Y eyes are level with the grass,  
And up and down each slender steep  
I watch its tiny people pass.  
The sun has lulled me half asleep.

And all beneath my breath I sing ...  
This joy of mine is sweet to hold!  
Such treasure had the miser king  
Who brushed the very dew to gold.

Deep in the sunny grass I lie  
And breathe the garden scents wind-driven,  
So happy that if I should die  
They could not comfort me with Heaven.

## PART III

### I

**O**NE time I felt the sun in all my veins,  
And bloomed on crystal mornings, flower-wise,  
And mourned as roses sadden in long rains.  
What pain is this the summer noon denies?

One time the hands of wind upon my hair  
Could heal me like a mother's touch and kiss.  
When I could give my airy griefs to air  
I never knew so sharp a thorn as this.

The joy of flower and wind and sighing bough—  
It comes not back again for tears and rue.  
A year ago I had not sought as now,  
And found the sky a vault of empty blue.

### II



**H**E loves no more. Upon the failing streams  
The summer burns—so burns another flame:  
I see his eyes alight with alien dreams ...  
That long-forgotten country whence he came.

Calls to him past my words; beyond my eyes  
Lost waters shine, remembered sunsets die.  
Ay, in my kiss another mouth replies,  
And speaks of kisses past, of lips put by.

Now this my heart divines, for words of love  
He gives me still (O woeful heart and bruised  
To still complain!)... But surely, when I move  
His eyes will never follow as they used.

### III

**T**HE soul that made love exquisite is gone,  
It is not that the word, the kiss, is changed.  
I cannot say, "Here was his thought withdrawn;  
So once was love, so now is love estranged."

But all of love that I could touch and know  
I held as one a lamp that makes his day,  
And touch it still, and see its flame burn low,  
Its shining figures fade to painted clay.

Ah, I would hold the semblance, keep the kiss;  
But watching in its heart the paling spark,  
I cry out when the shadows menace this,  
As children weep for terror of the dark.

### IV

**T**HAT all tomorrows have no wound in store  
For shrinking Joy, nor any prick of dread,  
I know, who closed its eyes forevermore,  
And keep this night a vigil with my dead.

This little space my out-thrown hands have stirred  
Is happy earth, for once it knew love's feet;  
Here once love stood and called the heart that heard,  
And all the garden, all the world, grew sweet.

I lay my joy within this hollowed space  
(I had not thought so blithe a thing could die!)  
And heap the happy earth upon the face  
That has no will to smile nor breath to sigh.

With dew beneath and hushing night above  
I cannot tell how long my grief has lain—  
Virgin, I will not plead you for my love,  
Only the pain,—if you would ease the pain.

### V

**T**HE world below was deep in stormy cloud;  
But high in sun we flew along the ledge,  
And to the strength I rode I cried aloud  
And spurred it near against the trembling edge.

(I rode Ramon along the mountain wall.  
Today he had no wilder mood than I—  
No wilder will for lawless wind to call  
Upon the narrow trail that meets the sky.)

The sharp air flowed like water through my hands.  
Heart, how I skirted death and laughed at pain!  
Forgotten pain in half-remembered lands  
Below me in the valleys with the rain.

## VI

**W**HAT alters with my changing? Not José,  
Content in little duties that he loves.  
Not Marta's dimming eyes that stare away  
Beyond the tranquil court, the circling doves.

I, too, I float on peace, forget almost,  
And then as drowning sight may pierce the sea  
To find the sun a green and wavering ghost,  
And shapes of earth distorted monstrously,—

I see a mocking earth, a sun distraught,  
I lose the buoying instant of relief  
And sink again as wearying soul and thought  
Drown in the sick amazement of my grief.

## VII

**I** TILT my hollowed life and look within:  
The wine it held has left a purple trace—  
Behold, a stain where happiness had been.  
If I should shatter down this empty vase,

Through what abysses would my soul be tossed  
To meet its judge in undiscovered lands?  
What sentence meted me, alone and lost,  
Before him with the fragments in my hands?

Better the patient earth that loves me still  
Should drip her clearness on this purple stain;  
Better my life upheld to her should fill  
With limpid dew, and gradual gift of rain.

## VIII

**S**OME whim of Marta's shields me from the night,  
And fretted that my curtain should be kept  
Close drawn, and wakeful candles over bright,  
I welcomed in the quiet moon and slept;

Then woke again in fear—the night was old,  
The witching tide of silver shut away,  
And Marta's shaking hand on mine was cold,  
Her bending face above me strange and grey.

"Who sleeps beneath the moon," she whispered low,  
"Must pale with her, nor wind nor noon-day sky  
Be his again whose pulses beat more slow,  
More faint, till with the waning moon ... they die."

THE END

## THE GARDEN OF DOLORES

**T**HE garden of Dolores! Here she walked  
When fretted in the twilight's pallid space  
The trees were black and delicate as lace,  
And palms were etchings, sharp and slender-stalked.

Now riots summer in these magic closes,  
And life is rounded in the frailest spray....  
Dolores, cold and buried yesterday,  
Is it thy spirit here among the roses?

For restless murmurs through the garden seek;  
To shadowy caress the flowers uncloze;  
A blossom in the dark magnolia glows—  
Or leaning pallor of an oval cheek?

Upon the dusk is borne a strange long cry,  
And one quick sob of wind the air has moved.  
Ah, perfect garden that Dolores loved,  
Her soul has called to thee ... a far goodbye.

## INDIFFERENCE

**T**HERE is a thread from you to me?  
I know, I feel it drawing still,  
A cobweb on my careless thought—  
Old habit-likeness—what you will.

Because it once was strong as Fate  
To bind a life to your desire,—  
Because its knots about my heart  
Could burn me like a witch's wire,

You will not think it loosed. And I  
(Ah, woman soul that prayed "Destroy!")  
Free from the fretting of my pain,  
Have killed the fitful strength of joy.

## AFTER-KNOWLEDGE

**Y**OU found my soul an untried instrument.  
I closed it fast and bade you take the key,  
Serene in my unquestioning content  
That you alone could wake the harmony.

I gave the key, indifferent though it cost  
Familiar lightness of unskilful touch,  
The music to the master. If I lost,  
He lets the little go who profits much.

Ah, then the keen, reluctant knowledge grew  
That though the chords were helpless at your will  
You had nor wit nor power to sound them true:  
Discordant they, or else forever still.

## TWO SPENDTHRIFT KINGS

These tawny sheaves, this fragrant land,  
Two spendthrift kings have found and seized,  
And Vagabondia may demand  
Its pockets lined, its troubles eased.

We hold or deed as fancy wills.  
We own the world by right and law—  
The hidden gold in all the hills,  
The sweetness in a yellow straw.

## GROWTH

**I** TWINE you, little trellis, close and fond,  
And swing in wistful threads above, beyond,  
For air and space to blossom. Be it so.  
Ah me! I love you, but the plant must grow.

I quiver with the call of summer heat,  
With all the wild sap stirring at my feet.  
My quiet trellis, impotent to know  
The earth and sun command me: I must grow.

You cannot share my ardent life apart,  
Nor feel the upward straining of my heart.  
In every vein the urging currents flow,  
Leaf after leaf unfolds: the plant must grow.

## CHANGE

**B**ELOVED, have I turned indeed so cold?  
My eyes are faithful, grieving with your grief;  
And if the year itself could grow not old,  
Could stand at waking sap and budding leaf,

An April heart might keep its first unrest,  
An April love the petals of its spring.  
When all the birds are silent in my breast,  
How can I answer when you bid me sing?

The autumn hills are brown: you will not see.  
The saddened woodland speaks, and finds you strange.  
Ah, dear one, all my world is kin to me,  
And with the swerving days I change, I change.

## WISTARIA

**T**HE blue wistaria hangs with bloom  
The Place of Memories far away.  
My heart has ached with it today—  
The blue wistaria is in bloom.

And one may pass so near, so near,  
With half-remembering eyes and cold,  
Where quickening with the budding year  
It clusters perfect as of old;

And one at sight of wizened sprays,  
Reluctant in an alien spring,  
Must feel the sharp, unblunted sting,  
The pang of unforgotten days.

### MY NOOK<sup>[6]</sup>

**O**H, half way up the hill it was, where one might sit leaf-hidden,  
And stare across the canyoned depths to distant miles of blue;  
Upon the little path to it no foot might step unbidden.  
It was my nook, and mine alone, and not another knew.  
And when my doll was sawdust, or my little hopes were fated,  
Or all my world was shaken by a little idol's fall,  
Up to my dear retreat I'd climb, with grief or anger weighted,  
And, hands behind fern-pillowed head, straightway forget it all.  
With tears yet damp upon my cheeks I'd fall to castle-building  
(The careless linnets fluttered near a little maid so still),  
And all the gorgeous tints I knew, and all the wealth of gilding,  
Were lavished on the future that I summoned there at will.  
"When one is small the troubles come, and then the tears must follow;  
When one is small one finds it good to run and cry alone,  
But I shall laugh to think that once I found my world so hollow—  
I shall not need this little nook," I thought, "when I am grown."

Now heart whose voice I drown by day to hear in hours of waking,  
Now eyes whose tears must burn the more because they may not flow,  
From sight of face or sound of speech if I could bear your aching,  
And bury it deep-hidden in the ferns of long ago!  
But oh! the pensive little ghost among her visions sitting  
Would view her weeping Future with so piteous surprise!  
No, I must leave her in her nook to dream her dreams unwitting—  
I could not take my trouble there, I could not meet her eyes.

### WHEN PLAINTIVELY AND NEAR THE CRICKET SINGS

**N**ow evening comes. Now stirs my discontent....  
Oh, ache of smallest, unforgotten things!  
How sharp you are when day and dark are blent,  
When beetles hurry by with vibrant wings,  
And plaintively and near the cricket sings.

The sighing garden calls me from the door;  
Above the hills a little crescent swings—  
Above the path where you will come no more  
When beetles hurry by on vibrant wings,  
And plaintively and near the cricket sings.

### THE LITTLE MEMORIES

**M**Y thoughts of you ... although I strain and sigh  
At stubborn roots, at boughs that tear my face,  
No plants in all my garden grow so high,  
Nor fill with sturdier life a wider place.

It pleases me, and wakes an old delight,  
To go with wordy shears in idle times  
And trim them as a patient gardener might,  
Clipping the thorny boughs to curves and rhymes.

If these were all, opposing strength with strength  
To make my hurt an easier thing to bear;  
If these alone usurped my garden's length,  
It would not be so hard—I should not care.

But close against the ground, oh, small and weak!  
The trodden flowers, the little memories, grow.  
Uprooting fingers press them to my cheek...  
Dear heart, I love you, and I miss you so.

### **PASS BY**

**M**IND said, "Pass by.  
The garden withers, for the spring is dry.  
For words of thine, for tears, it will not flow.  
The long road calls a wanderer: rise and go."

Heart said, "Pass by.  
The flowers were pale and scentless; let them die,  
And down the road Forget your pathway take  
To find beneath the Song my fine, small ache,  
And gather flowers blue and flowers red  
To hear my whisper of the white ones dead."

### **IN EMPTY COURTS**

**H**IS love is warm and constant as the sun,  
Like sunlight in the outer spaces spent,  
In empty courts where tumbling fountains run,  
And flowers bloom, and he is well content.

To you my heart must turn for all its light—  
Alas, the grudging taper that you give!  
So small to make the inner temple bright,  
So dim to give the glow by which I live.

He is the sun, for all the world to mark,  
So warm and fair he shines! nor understands  
That I must still be crouching in the dark,  
Shielding a little flame with loving hands.

### **DOWN THE TRAIL**

**B**REAK camp, the dawn is here!  
A sea has swept beneath us in the night—  
Poured outward in a wrinkled floor of white,  
And left our eyrie clear.  
There in the deeps the little trail is curled—  
We plunge like divers to the under-world.

The manzanita stirs!  
Look, in that little thicket just ahead!  
Down, down, the covey whirrs,  
Mocking us, careful, led,  
Slow-slipping beads along a slender thread.

Here the stream flows;  
Here we tread yellow leaves.  
(Sun in the sycamores,  
Sun on the granite walls.)  
All is so still,  
Never wind blows,  
Only the singing stream  
Shouts little waterfalls.

We round the mighty shoulder of a hill—  
Oh, sweet airs damp with ferns!  
The day is old, the lengthening shadows chill—  
The wanderer returns.

Traffic, and wakeful eyes of little lights;  
The black crowd passing near; and far away  
A fading rose of sunset hanging low  
Above the roofs of indigo and grey.

**“BELLS FROM OVER THE HILLS SOUND SWEET.”—*Russian Proverb.***

**O**H, when the afternoon is long and hazy,  
So still the valley lies, so still, so still,  
With sweeping smoky spirals blue and lazy,  
With yellow light aglow from hill to hill.  
Sometimes the echoes startle with my singing;  
Sometimes a bird the heavy silence fills,  
And always I can hear them ringing, ringing,  
My mocking bells, my Bells from over the Hills.

Sweetly, faintly ring they, cruel ring they:  
“Captive in your prison hear us call!”  
Message from a life of action bring they,  
Life beyond these hills more sweet than all.  
Would that I could heed their call and follow,  
Waking while this drowsy valley sleeps,  
Follow Fortune over hill and hollow,  
Wrest from her the treasures that she keeps!

My freedom gained, what fate would be for telling?  
Still hills and hills beyond would stretch for aye.  
Peace in this little valley has its dwelling,  
And that the chase would profit who shall say?  
For hopes and dear delights, ah, who can near them?  
Something ungained, the heart with longing fills,  
And follow though I might I still should hear them,  
The mocking bells, the Bells from over the Hills.

**IN TOWN**

**T**HE long street where the people go—  
It is not like the paths I know,  
Yet can I find the morning there,  
All crystal light and early air.

Sharp-angled roofs in slanting sun  
Grow dimmer as they slope and blend,  
Until they crowd no more, and one  
May see his mountains at the end.

Then, when the day has had her will,  
I lean upon my window-sill,  
And watch them floating, clean and high—  
My sunset ships across the sky.

## MOODS

### I

**S**WEET grasses, tasseled, bent and tall;  
And sweet last light across the meadow—  
The wind has tangled, left them all  
In webs of green, in silver shadow.

And to your speech my heart replies,  
Still silvering to each word that passes,  
Until a tangled joy it lies,  
A shining web of wind-blown grasses.

### II

**A** MEMORY of tears that day,  
Of small and piteous lives misused:  
The fallen bird we could not save,  
The butterfly we helped—and bruised.

And last, to fill repentant eyes,  
Most bright and frail of winged things—  
A moment's faith, an hour's love,  
Grieving the dust with broken wings.

## A MISTY MORNING

**L**ow-arched above me as I moved the hollowed air was clear;  
Beyond was whiteness dim and strange, and spectral shapes drew near.

Upon the little shore of brown that touched the misty sea,  
Upon the shadowy borderland, one paused and looked at me;

Then hurried on with greeting smile and sudden vivid face:  
A friend had started into life within my magic space!

Into the world of ghosts again I watched him fade away—  
First black he was, then dim he was, then merged in formless grey.

## TWO SONGS



**Y**OU love the chant of green,  
The low-voiced trees, the meadow's monotone.  
O friend of mine, it is for these you pray.  
This alien land must call unheard, unseen,  
While one beloved note your heart has known,  
To hunger for it, half a world away.

Come with me to my height,  
And stand at sunset when the winds are still,  
Watching the hollow valleys brim with light,  
The red and brown and yellow hills—they shout,  
And on the shoulders of the marching host  
The bayonets are gleaming points of white.

Pressing beyond to deep and gradual blues,  
Their lessening voices die in distance pale—  
Ineffably dissolved in opal hues;  
Against the sky the last sweet echoes fail  
While all the West is quivering, fold on fold  
To one great voice—one vibrant peal of gold.

## NOON

**T**HE brook flowed through a bending arch of leaves—  
Flowed through an arch of leaves into the sun;  
But all was shadow where it left my feet—  
A shade with netted ripples overrun,  
A brook that flowed in coolness to the sun.

Beyond the arch of shadow color lay—  
Vivid to narrowed eyelids, fiercely bright,  
And bright the happy water slipped away  
In gleaming pools and broken lines of light.

## YOUR BEAUTIFUL PASSING

**A**CROSS my thought has trailed your beautiful passing,  
As a wild bird ruffles the motionless brink of the water,  
Moving in gradual path on its mirror of shadow,  
After him streaking and trembling long ripples of silver.

## BY MOONLIGHT

**I**S this the world I knew? Beneath the day  
It glowed with golden heat, with vivid hues—  
Mountains and sky that merged in melting blues  
And hazy air that shimmered far away.

This world is white beneath a silver sky—  
White with pale brightness, luminously chill.  
The moon reigns queen, but faintly shining still  
The dim stars glimmer on the hilltops high.

Here, where long grasses touch across the stream  
That threads with babbling laugh its narrow way,  
My face turned upward to pale gleams that stray  
Through whispering willow boughs ... I dream and dream.

## ONE DAY

**T**HE levels where the trail began  
Were sown with silver-grey.  
We bruised the leaves with hurrying feet  
To wafts of strong and tarry sweet,  
A moment's pleasure as we ran,  
Forgotten on our way.

Above, along the farthest crest,  
In every brief and breathless rest  
The spice of sage was ours,  
Crushed from the dull and slender leaves—  
The tiny yellow flowers,  
When day was done  
No more remembered than the wind and sun.

### THE MISSION GRAVES

**B**Y man forgotten,  
Nature remembers, with her fitful tears.  
The wooden slabs lose name and date with years,  
And crumble, rotten.

The Padre there,  
On Saint's day, from an evening rite returning,  
Set for each unknown soul a candle burning,  
With muttered prayer.

Glow-worms, they shone—  
Strange, spectral-gleaming through the lonely dark.  
Whose nameless dust did each faint glimmer mark—  
Skull, crumbling bone?

Ah, the Dead knew!  
The grateful Dead, far-called from voids of space,  
Each by the tiny spark that gave him grace,  
Watched, the night through.

### ALONG THE TRACK

**T**HE track has led me out beyond the town  
To follow day across the waning fields,  
The crisping weeds and wastes of tender brown.

On either side the feathered tops are high,  
A tracery of broken arabesques  
Upon the sullen crimson of the sky.

Into the west the narrowing rails are sped.  
They cut the crayon softness of the dusk  
With thin converging gleams of bloody red.

### A PLACE OF DREAMS

**H**ERE will we drink content, comrade of mine—  
Here, where the little stream, to meet the sun,  
Flows down a yellow rock like yellow wine.

Here will we launch a leaf to distant shores,  
And in it shut a word for Wonderland—  
The blue Unknown beyond the sycamores.

Think not, O Liliast, that the love of this night will endure in the sun. Hast thou beheld fungi, white, evil, rosy-lined, poisonous, shrivel in the eyes of day?

In this wilderness of strange hearts it is not thine alone that concerns me. Many brave hearts of men are more to me than thine. The hearts of men breathe deeply. As for thy heart, it runs from me, it is quicksilver, it does not concern me greatly.

### **“TO ROSY BUDS....”**

**T**o rosy buds in orchards of the spring,  
To melting clouds in endless deeps of air,  
My love shall lift a swelling throat and sing,  
Akin to all things fugitive and fair.

They shut love from his heaven and he sings?  
But captive eyes are pitiful to see!  
Oh, flashing sun on upward-beating wings—  
Oh, tumbling notes of joy—my bird is free!

Dear love, forever strange, beloved most!  
Dear fleeting buds, bear not your fruit and die!  
Be this a path forever found and lost,  
A drift of bloom upon an April sky.

### **YESTERDAY<sup>[8]</sup>**

**N**ow all my thoughts were crisped and thinned  
To elfin threads, to gleaming browns.  
Like tawny grasses lean with wind  
They drew your heart across the downs.  
Your will of all the winds that blew  
They drew across the world to me,  
To thread my whimsey thoughts of you  
Along the downs, above the sea.

Beneath a pool beyond the dune—  
So green it was and amber-walled  
A face would glimmer like a moon  
Seen whitely through an emerald—  
And there my mermaid fancy lay  
And dreamed the light and you were one,  
And flickered in her sea-weed's sway  
A broken largesse of the sun.

Above the world as evening fell  
I made my heart into a sky,  
And through a twilight like a shell  
I saw the shining sea-gulls fly.  
I found between the sea and land  
And lost again, unwrit, unheard,  
A song that fluttered in my hand  
And vanished like a silver bird.

### **THE MOURNER**

**B**ECAUSE my love has wave and foam for speech,  
And never words, and yearns as water grieves,  
With white arms curving on a listless beach,  
And murmurs inarticulate as leaves—

I am become beloved of the night—  
Her huge sea-lands ineffable and far  
Hold crouched and splendid Sorrow, eyed with light,  
And Pain who beads his forehead with a star.

## AVE ATQUE VALE

**I**T gathers where the moody sky is bending;  
It stirs the air along familiar ways—  
A sigh for strange things dear forever ending,  
For beauty shrinking in these alien days.

Now nothing is the same, old visions move me:  
I wander silent through the waning land,  
And find for youth and little leaves to love me  
The old, old lichen crumbling in my hand.

What shifting films of distance fold you, blind you,  
This windy eve of dreams, I cannot tell.  
I know they grope through some strange mist to find you,  
My hands that give you Greeting and Farewell.

## NOTES

[1] This poem, so distinctly prophetic, was written a year and four months before her death.

[2] "The Rose" was written for Mr. Porter Garnett on the occasion of his marriage.

[3] These lines were in response to a long telegram dispatched at night by a distant friend.

[4] Of this poem, "Just a Dog," a letter says: "My cousin, who used often to play on the piano, died; and after his death his dog, when anyone touched the instrument, used to come from wherever he might be to see if the player were not his master. Then he would slink away again. The dog died after a few grieving months. I loved him, and made these verses."

[5] "Mirage" is an endeavor to portray the alien attitude of one who had long vainly sought love.

[6] "My Nook" was written at the age of sixteen.

[7] "Think Not, O Lilies." These prose lines were recalled out of a dream. They are included here because of their singular beauty.

[8] "Yesterday," and "The Mourner" which follows it, are the last poems. "Ave atque Vale" was written some two years before.

The responsibility for these notes lies with Mr. Henry Anderson Lafler, who has edited this book. Thanks are due to Mr. George Sterling and Mr. Porter Garnett, who have lightened the labor of its preparation.

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\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK POEMS \*\*\*

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