



NORA MAY FRENCH

Collected Poems

EARLY POEMS, THE 1910 COLLECTION, AND RECOVERED WORKS

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

Extremes and Moderations

Early Southern California Poetry

Extremes and Moderations is a Text-Tech Papers project devoted to recovering poetry written, published, and circulated in Los Angeles and Southern California. Each volume brings neglected books and poems back into view through carefully prepared texts, archival images, biographical context, and a clear record of the surviving sources.

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Archival Images

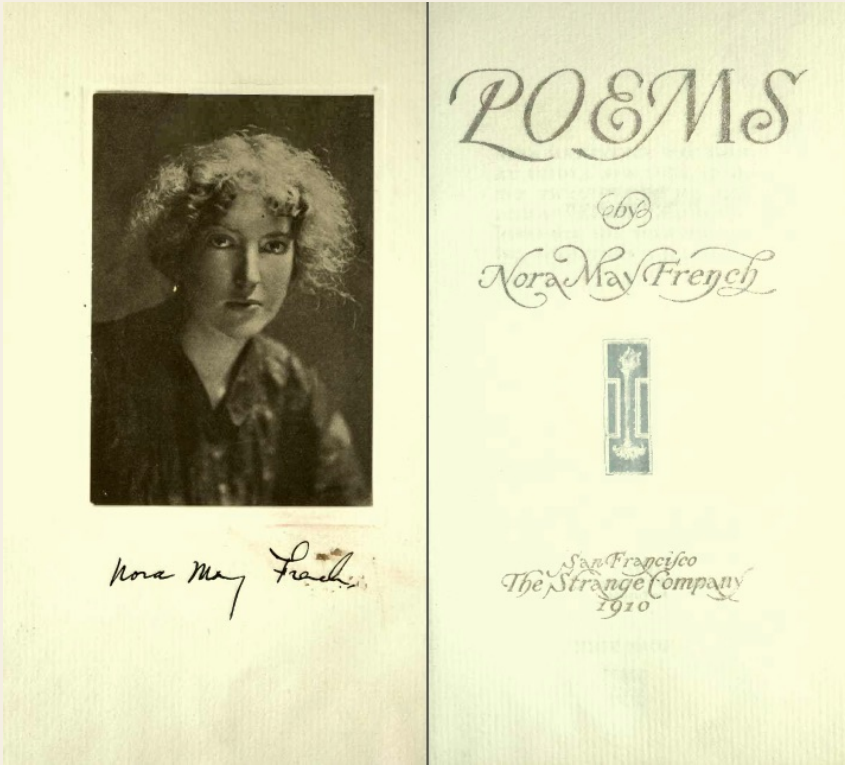
A short selection from the source record



Nora May French, portrait by Arnold Genthe, signed and dated 1907.



Nora May French outdoors. The Bancroft Library Portrait Collection, identifier POR: French, Nora May:1; photographer and date unidentified.



Frontispiece portrait and title-page spread from *Poems* (The Strange Company, 1910), including French's reproduced signature.

INTRODUCTION

A life in art, work, letters, and California poetry

A life recovered from fragments

Nora May French lived only twenty-six years, published no book during her lifetime, and left no orderly personal archive. Yet the record that survives is unusually vivid: poems in California magazines, letters scattered through the papers of male contemporaries, family recollections, newspaper accounts, photographs, and the posthumous volume assembled by her friends in 1910. Read together, these materials reveal not simply the tragic figure that newspapers made of her after her death, but a working writer and artist whose brief career joined the landscapes of Southern California, the San Francisco literary world, and the early community of writers at Carmel-by-the-Sea.

French's literary afterlife has often been distorted by the story of her death. Contemporary coverage turned a complicated young woman into a romantic emblem, and later accounts repeated many of those details without distinguishing observation, hearsay, and speculation. Judith Allen's 1963 Mills College thesis, based partly on an interview with French's sister Helen French Hunt and on manuscripts in the Bancroft Library, remains the most substantial early reconstruction. Later archival work, especially Joanne Lafler's chronology of the surviving French-Lafler correspondence and Catherine Prendergast's study of the Carmel circle, has made the emotional and material pressures on French more legible while also showing how incomplete the record remains. The account below therefore separates documented facts from reasonable inference and leaves genuine uncertainties open.

Aurora and the French family

Nora May French was born on April 26, 1881, in Aurora, New York, on the eastern shore of Cayuga Lake. She was the third child and first daughter of Edward French and Mary Wells French. Her father, a Civil War veteran and a son of Augustus C. French, governor of Illinois from 1846 to 1853, had studied law before turning to education. For many years he taught at the institution founded by the Wells family in Aurora, offering subjects that included Latin, mathematics, chemistry, and literature. French's mother belonged to that same prominent local Wells family, whose enterprises and philanthropy shaped the town and its college.

The household was musical and bookish. The children read aloud, played music, and walked in the wooded Finger Lakes country. Family recollection described Nora as reading at four and becoming absorbed in Hawthorne's retellings of classical myth, fairy stories, nonsense verse, and the natural world. Those early habits endured. Her mature poems repeatedly turn hills, gardens, fog, wind, sea, and flowers into agents of perception rather than decorative backgrounds.

In 1888 the family joined the migration to Southern California and settled near what is now Glendale. The move promised health and economic independence, but the regional land boom was collapsing. Their attempted fruit ranch failed; a fire destroyed the house, its library, and family possessions; and foreclosure followed. Edward French then taught in the Los Angeles public schools. The family's reversals made education intermittent and required all the children, especially the daughters, to combine study with paid work.

Education, art, and the first poems

French began writing poems and prose in early adolescence and showed strong ability in drawing. The earliest poem yet located, *How Ends the Day?*, appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on May 20, 1894, under the name Nora French; she was thirteen when it was published and may have written it at twelve. Its conventional Christian close belongs to a very young writer, but its sequence of intensely observed stream, flowers, birds, and pines already anticipates the sensory precision of her later landscape poems.

Her formal schooling was repeatedly interrupted. She attended high school briefly, entered and left institutions that became Occidental College and UCLA, and in 1898 studied at the Macleod Art School in Los Angeles while working for tuition and living expenses. In 1899 a New York relative enabled her to spend a year studying in New York City. She began at the Art Students League and then moved to William Merritt Chase's school, where training in design seemed more likely than painting to lead to employment. She continued writing and sent work home to Los Angeles publications.

When the support ended in 1900, French returned to California and worked for several years designing carved leather goods. The job used her drawing skill but did not answer her ambitions. She read widely—Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, Browning, Whitman, Fitzgerald, Kipling, Housman, Yeats, and other poets named in family recollection—and continued to publish. Her father's encouragement mattered, even as the family's finances made a sustained artistic apprenticeship impossible.

Lummis and the early poems

Charles F. Lummis became French's first consistent editor. Between April 1899 and October 1905 his Los Angeles magazines *The Land of Sunshine* and *Out West* printed fourteen poems by her. They appear at the beginning of this edition in a separate section, in chronological order and in their magazine versions. Earlier scholarship counted twelve, overlooking *Rain* and *Noon*; the journal index and scanned issues establish fourteen appearances.

These publications record French learning in public. *By Moonlight*, printed before her eighteenth birthday, uses regular quatrains and a dreamlike nocturnal landscape. *Summer Dusk* arranges its lines in a visibly stepped pattern. *The Mission Graves* and *The Old Garden* merge California history with elegy, while *Mist*, *Along the Track*, *Down the Trail*, and *Noon* create a more compressed visual field. Several poems were later revised for the 1910 volume. Printing both states here preserves that development instead of silently replacing an early version with a later one.

Her private life during these years was equally unsettled. French resisted the assumption that marriage alone should define a woman's future and broke engagements that promised security without intellectual companionship. Captain Alan Hiley, an English adventurer and timberman who was separated

but not yet divorced, became a serious suitor and influenced portions of the long sequence *The Spanish Girl*. In 1905 French also began an intense literary correspondence with Henry Anderson Lafler, the San Francisco editor of the *Argonaut*. Lafler offered criticism, solicited poems, and described the northern California literary world that she longed to join.

Loss, San Francisco, and professional writing

Mary Wells French died in July 1905 after a long illness during which Nora and Helen cared for her. Their father, nearly blind from cataracts, went to the veterans' home at Sawtelle, where his sight was partly restored and where he worked in the records office. With their brothers already away, the sisters supported themselves and lived together. The family home had effectively dissolved.

French's relationship with Lafler developed from mentorship into a sexual relationship while he, too, was still married and seeking a divorce. Surviving correspondence documents a pregnancy and an abortion during the winter of 1905-06. This episode, long suppressed or euphemized in accounts of her life, clarifies both the risks borne by an unmarried woman and the asymmetry of her situation. It should not, however, be treated as a single explanatory key to either her work or her death. The surviving archive is partial: letters were destroyed, separated, or preserved under the names of the men around her.

French planned to move north in 1906, but the San Francisco earthquake and fire delayed her. She and Helen spent part of that summer at a camp in Santa Anita Canyon, where rest and mountain air helped her recurrent ill health. In September she went alone to the damaged and rebuilding city. Lafler introduced her to a Bohemian circle that included George and Caroline Sterling, Jack and Charmian London, Porter Garnett, Blanche Partington, Ina Coolbrith, Gelett Burgess, Xavier Martinez, Will and Wallace Irwin, and James Hopper. French was immediately recognized as both talented and strikingly original, though accounts of her beauty too often displaced attention from her work.

After an early bout of pleural pneumonia, French resumed writing and publishing. *Sunset* printed *The Lost Chimneys*, her witty response to Christmas in earthquake-damaged San Francisco, and "San Francisco, New Year's, 1907," one of her most forceful public poems. In 1907 she took work as

a telephone operator, partly to support herself and partly to gather material. Her semi-autobiographical *The Diary of a Telephone Girl*, polished with help from Gelett Burgess, appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* on October 19, 1907. Its national publication was the clearest sign yet that she might build a professional prose career alongside her poetry.

Carmel and the final months

French visited the Sterlings in Carmel several times during the summer of 1907. In late August or early September she left telephone work and went there for what was meant to be a two-week stay. The visit lengthened. She lived in the Sterlings' tent-house, read and wrote, attended gatherings, walked the coast, and became close to Caroline Sterling after an initially wary reception. Mary Austin, who had championed French's poems before meeting her, later placed her gifts beside those of George Sterling and Jack London.

By this time French had ended her relationship with Lafler and resumed plans to marry Hiley once his divorce was complete. Letters suggest hope and sociability as well as physical exhaustion, depression, and instability. Some later writers have proposed another pregnancy; the evidence is circumstantial and does not justify presenting that claim as fact. Nor can any one disappointed relationship explain what followed. French's own arrangements indicate premeditation, but the archive does not yield a complete motive.

During the night of November 13-14, 1907, while a guest in the Sterling home, French died from cyanide poisoning. She was twenty-six. Newspapers immediately sensationalized the death, often treating her poems as clues in a predetermined romantic drama. Family and friends gathered in Carmel; after cremation in San Francisco, her ashes were scattered from the coast near Point Lobos later that month. The memorial linked her permanently to the landscape that had entered her final poems, but it also encouraged the conversion of a working writer into a legend.

The books after her death

French had left no finished manuscript for a book. Henry Anderson Lafler, George Sterling, and Porter Garnett gathered her surviving poems, and the Strange Company issued *Poems* in San Francisco in 1910. The handsome volume, dedicated by her father and sister, contained the body of work on which her reputation rested. Its contents were not literally complete: manuscripts had been lost, early publications were omitted, and friends made editorial choices that cannot always be reconstructed. Even the participants disagreed about Lafler's editorial authority and about the degree to which French's individuality had been preserved.

The 1910 book soon became scarce. Later revivals include Mary Rudge's 1986 selected edition and *The Outer Gate: The Collected Poems of Nora May French*, edited by Donald Sidney-Fryer and Alan Gullette in 2009. That volume restored ten fugitive works not printed in 1910: *My Maid of Dreams*, *The Lost Chimneys*, *The Panther Woman*, *Poppies*, *Answered*, *Be Silent*, *Love*, *How Ends the Day?*, *A Dream-Love*, *The Suicide*, and *At the End*. Those recoveries, together with the fourteen Lummi magazine appearances, make possible the fuller reading text presented here.

French's poems remain formally traditional: sonnets, quatrains, short lyrics, songs, and the multipart narrative of *The Spanish Girl*. Within those forms, however, she developed a distinctive poetics of thresholds—daylight and dusk, land and sea, city and trail, speech and silence, attachment and flight. Her best work combines visual exactness with an unsentimental awareness that beauty is temporary. The poems deserve to be read in that range, not merely as prophecy or autobiography.

Editorial Note and Sources

The collected-poems section follows the order of the 2009 collected edition. The 1910 texts were drawn from the archival scan and checked against the Project Gutenberg transcription; the ten later recoveries were checked against the scanned 2009 edition. The opening Early *Poems* section reproduces all fourteen appearances in Lummis's journals in chronological order.

Repeated titles are retained because the magazine and collected versions sometimes differ. Publication notes identify the witness used for each text and distinguish known first printings from cases in which no earlier printing has yet been located; provenance is supplied only when a specific manuscript, recovery, date, or editorial circumstance can be documented. Original italics, stanza divisions, and intentional authorial line indents are represented. Lines that merely wrapped within the narrow original page are allowed to reflow without a hanging indent. Display capitalization of titles is regularized; ornamental initials, page furniture, and purely typographic display devices are not reproduced. Doubled hyphens and rhetorical dashes are rendered as closed-up em dashes.

1. Judith Allen, *The Life and Writing of Nora May French* (M.A. thesis, Mills College, 1963). Allen interviewed French's sister Helen French Hunt and consulted manuscript collections at the Bancroft Library.
2. Nora May French, *Poems* (San Francisco: The Strange Company, 1910). The archival scan in the project folder was checked against the public-domain Project Gutenberg transcription, ebook 52796.
3. Donald Sidney-Fryer and Alan Gullette, eds., *The Outer Gate: The Collected Poems of Nora May French* (Hippocampus Press, 2009). Used to identify and verify the ten works absent from the 1910 volume; its copyrighted biographical and editorial prose has not been reproduced.
4. *The Land of Sunshine and Out West, 1899-1905*. All fourteen magazine appearances in the Early *Poems* section were checked against scans of the printed pages in the Lummis journals archive.
5. Joanne Lafler, "The King of Telegraph Hill," *California History* 81, no. 2 (2003-04), 30-49. A chronology and study of Henry Anderson Lafler based on the surviving correspondence.
6. Catherine Prendergast, *The Gilded Edge: Two Audacious Women and the Cyanide Love Triangle That Shook America* (Dutton, 2021), and the University of Illinois News Bureau summary of her archival research.
7. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley: French-related letters, photographs, and papers dispersed through the collections of Henry Anderson Lafler, George Sterling, James Marie Hopper, and others.

EARLY POEMS

The Land of Sunshine and Out West, 1899-1905

By Moonlight

Is this the world I know? 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, 'neath amethystine sky,
White with pale brightness, luminously chill;
The moon reigns queen, but faintly shining still
The dim stars glimmer o'er the hill-tops 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.

Publication. *The Land of Sunshine*, April 1899

Summer Dusk

Earth's parched 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 rustlings; moths take ghostly flight,

And waking crickets shrill long-drawn delight.

Publication. *The Land of Sunshine*, September 1899

The Mission Graves

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

The Father, there,
One Saint's Day from an evening mass 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—
Each to his taper drawn through voids of space,
Each on his grave (eyes, in a formless face!)
Watched—the night through.

Publication. *The Land of Sunshine*, January 1900

The Old Garden

The garden of Dolores! Here she walked,
When, fretted on 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 thro' 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 dark 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 last good-by.

Publication. *The Land of Sunshine*, March 1900

Answered

The morn crept in and found her dead,
The morn crept in upon our tears;
“O life of idle days!” we said,
“O short young life of wasted years!
That Death should close the laughing eyes,
And still the lips before we knew
If through her girlhood’s mysteries
Shone aught of purpose strong and true.”

The Spring came to her where she slept—
“In flowers her nature blooms,” we thought;
For slender daisies round her crept,
Gay, with her careless beauty fraught.
But strange! we saw them with a start,
We saw, and as we looked, we knew—
For there above the girlish heart,
With upturned faces, Pansies grew.

Publication. *The Land of Sunshine*, May 1900

Mist

Low-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 gray.

Publication. *Out West*, October 1903

Two Songs

You love the chant of green,
 The low-voiced trees, the meadow's monotone.
Oh! 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.

Publication. *Out West*, November 1903

One Day

The levels where the trail began
Were sown with silver gray.
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.

Publication. *Out West*, February 1904

Along the Track

The 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.

Publication. *Out West*, March 1904

Down the Trail

Break 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.

Wave after wave creeps upward to the pines,
Hangs in the ragged boughs and blurs them dim;
Melts from the sharp dark lines—
Each smallest limb
Cut like a cameo on a ground of light.
There in the deeps our 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 on 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—
O, sweet airs damp with ferns!
The day grows old, the lengthening shadows chill—
The wanderer returns.

* * * * *

Traffic, and wakeful eyes of little lights;
The black crowd passing near; and far away
A last clear pink, translucent as a pearl,
Above the roofs of indigo and grey.

Publication. *Out West*, May 1904

By the Hospital

Who 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.

Publication. *Out West*, July 1904

Rain

The 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—
Oh, passing words, a blue so dear!
And drifting in the shining pools
The clouds are white and near.

Publication. *Out West*, March 1905

Noon

The 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.

Publication. *Out West*, July 1905

The Constant Ones

The tossing trees had every flag unfurled
To hail their chief, but now the sun is set,
And in this 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.

Publication. *Out West*, October 1905

COLLECTED POEMS

The 1910 collection with ten recovered works

The Outer Gate

Life 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 1. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Provenance. The 1910 editors date the poem to approximately July 1906, one year and four months before French's death.

Rain

The 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.

Publication. *Out West*, March 1905; revised in *Poems* (1910), p. 2.

Best-Loved

It 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 3. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

The Rose

Ay, 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 4. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Provenance. The 1910 notes say French wrote it for the marriage of Porter Garnett, who later designed and hand-set *Poems*.

Between Two Rains

It 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 vaporing 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 5. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

The Message

So 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....

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 6. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Provenance The 1910 notes identify a long nighttime telegram from a distant friend as the poem's occasion.

By the Hospital

Who 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.

Publication. *Out West*, July 1904; revised in *Poems* (1910), p. 7.

Provenance. The 2009 editors date its composition to about 1901 or slightly later. The magazine scan has been collated with the 1910 text.

“*Oh, Dryad Thoughts*”

Oh, 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 8. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

My Maid of Dreams

Now foliated darkness of low hills is kissed
With threaded pearl slim-white as maiden's wrist;
Now with the opal films of earliest mist
My Maid of Dreams comes to me ... Milky fair,
Her face of changeful lights that shame the morn,
And twin blue hyacinths in her eyes are born,
Dawn glimmers phosphor-pale upon her hair.

Her face floats up to me thro' waters dark,
Beneath the wrinkled clearness whitely seen;
And filtering shafts of yellow noontide mark
Her gleaming fingers, glimpsed in flickering green.

The air grows jewel-red in widening spheres
From day's deep heart low burning in the West.
Sweet airs, blow cool the breath of earth's first tears—
Blow me my Maid of Dreams ... Ah, dearest best!
Flame-lit thou comest thro' the silent land,
My poppy-crowned, dusk-eyed with visioned night!
Lead me, oh maid, with touch of guiding hand,
To lands unknown ... to realms of new delight.

Publication. *Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 1900, signed Nora May French; omitted from *Poems* (1910); collected in *The Outer Gate* (2009).

Provenance. Text follows the 2009 recovery from the newspaper printing.

Music in the Pavilion

Faces 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 9. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Provenance. The 2009 editors date the poem to about 1899.

Rebuke

The 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 10. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

In Camp

I

As 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

My 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 11. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Provenance The 2009 editors associate the poem with French's summer 1906 stay in Santa Anita Canyon.

The Nymph

From 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 12. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Provenance. The 2009 editors place it before *The Spanish Girl* and identify it as French's only other surviving narrative poem.

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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 16. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Provenance. The 2009 editors date the poem to approximately 1901 or later.

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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 17. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

The Constant Ones

The 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.

Publication. *Out West*, October 1905; revised in *Poems* (1910), p. 18.

Instinct

To 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 19. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

The Lost Chimneys

A jagged crown they topped the town,
They stood in wind and weather—
Stout chimneys Santa clambered down
For years and years together.
In all the havoc April wrought
No shattered flue will hold him;
Who's given the good old Saint a thought—
Has anybody told him?

He doesn't read as others do
The daily publications;
He doesn't hear the whole year through,
The gossip of the nations.
His skillful fingers, busy Saint,
Make hobby-horses sleeker,
Daub all the Noah's arks with paint
And give each lamb a squeaker.

He'll come with dolls for Lil and Sue,
A train for little brother,
And find of house and hearth and flue
No brick upon another!
Turn over in your Christmas dream
And snore in guilty slumber
While Santa tires his bronco team
To find your change of number!

Publication. *Sunset*, December 1906; omitted from *Poems* (1910); collected in *The Outer Gate* (2009).

Provenance. Text follows the 2009 recovery from the periodical printing.

The Panther Woman

I face the tranquil day with tranquil eyes—
On high sea-hills my cheeks are cold with mist.
In white foam-fingers quick desire dies.

Dies as a strangled bird the wave has torn—
Ay, drowns and dies this winged desire of mine
In white sea-fingers of the tidal morn.

But I would kill the restless silken night,
And I would still the wings that beat the dark,
And grasp the little throat of heart's-delight,

And drown the savage will that understands
How love would laugh to clasp your bending head,
How love would hold your face in her two hands,

How love would press your angry lips apart,
And leave the willful bruising of her kiss
In the sweet satin flesh above your heart.

Publication Unpublished in French's lifetime; first collected in *The Outer Gate* (2009).

Provenance. Manuscript in The Bancroft Library, dated September-November 1907; among French's last surviving poems.

San Francisco New Year's, 1907

Said 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.

"Thought 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!

Publication. *San Francisco Call*, January 1, 1907, as "Says the Old Year to the New"; reprinted under that title in *Current Literature*, June 1908; collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 20.

The Poppy Field

Beyond 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 22. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Poppies

Where saffron poppy-petals curl apart,
Deep glowing lies the warmth of summer's heart.

Touch but a poppy-petal, satin-sleek,
And know the living silk of summer's cheek.

This curving blossom cup beneath her gaze
Brimms with the filtered gold of perfect days;

Then o'er the hills she smiles—and one by one,
Lo! poppies quiver yellow to the sun.

Publication. Unpublished before *The Outer Gate* (2009).

Provenance. Manuscript in The Bancroft Library on Hotel Nadeau stationery; composed before September 1906.

You

All 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 23. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Just a Dog

So 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 24. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Provenance The 1910 notes derive the incident from a French family story and quote French's description of a cousin's grieving dog.

Mirage

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.

Publication. *Sunset*, October 1907; collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 25.

Dusk

Earth'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.

Publication. *The Land of Sunshine*, September 1899, as *Summer Dusk*; revised and retitled in *Poems* (1910), p. 26.

The Spanish Girl

PART I

I THE VINE

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

II THE CHAPEL

The 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

They 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

Across 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

Where 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

Oh, 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 poising bird is hung,
With supple body swaying slow,
 With parted lips and arms up-flung.

VII

Always 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

Now 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—

IV

Beyond 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

Surely 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

My 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

One 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

He 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

The 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

That 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

The 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

What 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

Some 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.”

Publication. The complete three-part sequence was first collected in *Poems* (1910), pp. 29–58. Part II, lyric VII, appeared independently as “Happiness” in the *American Magazine*, June 1908.

Provenance. Parts I–II were probably composed around 1903; Part III was written in the winter of 1905–06. The sequence survives through the posthumous 1910 text.

The Garden of Dolores

The 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 unclose;
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,

Publication. *The Land of Sunshine*, March 1900, as *The Old Garden*; revised and retitled in *Poems* (1910), p. 59.

Answered

The moon crept in and found her dead,
The moon crept in upon our tears;
“O life of idle days!” we said,
“O short young life of wasted years!
That Death should close the laughing eyes,
And still the lips before we knew
If through her girlhood’s mysteries
Shone aught of purpose strong and true.”

The Spring came to her where she slept—
“In flowers her nature blooms,” we thought;
For slender daisies round her crept,
Gay, with her careless beauty fraught.
But strange! we saw them with a start,
We saw, and as we looked we knew—
For there above the girlish heart,
With upturned faces, pansies grew.

Publication. *The Land of Sunshine*, May 1900; omitted from *Poems* (1910); collected in *The Outer Gate* (2009).

Provenance. Text follows the 2009 recovered state. The original magazine state appears in *Early Poems*; see the Afterword for its principal variant.

Indifference

There 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 60. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

After-Knowledge

You 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 61. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Be Silent, Love

Be silent, love. I will not have you speak;
While weary tongues may falter, speech endures.
This only dies:—Your lips upon my cheek,
The wonder of my eyes asleep on yours.

I will not that we barter pebbles tossed,
To wave-worn shores by sea on sea of men.
This blossom of the moment born and lost,
Is wholly ours and not to live again.

All moulded words another breast must grace,
As down the years indifferent jewels shine.
But none may share the silence of your face
Down bending to the lifted kiss of mine.

Publication. Survives in an unidentified newspaper clipping dated June 16, 1910; omitted from *Poems* (1910); collected in *The Outer Gate* (2009).

Provenance Lafler's correspondence records a revision in February 1906. The clipping is attached to Ina Coolbrith's copy of *Poems* in The Bancroft Library.

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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 62. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 63. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Change

Beloved, 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 64. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Provenance. The 2009 editors date the poem to late summer 1907.

Wistaria

The 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 65. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

How Ends the Day?

We wandered where the violets bloom, beside the sunlit stream.
 We saw, where on the crystal waves, the water lilies dream.
 Their gold hearts wreathed in leaves of pearl, all silvered by the sun,
 We heard the brook laugh as it swayed their bright heads one by one;
 Yet no smile dawned upon your face, to chase the tears away.
 “The waters cease, the lilies fade, in darkness ends the day.”

We walked through paths where gleams of light like gold through green
 leaves came,
 Where darts down through the shadowy boughs the oriole’s flash of flame;
 We listened where the voice of birds swells out in chorus strong;
 How the rippling notes of gladness poured forth its glorious song!
 But answering joy woke not in you, you saw but shadows gray.
 “The sunshine fades and beauty flees, in sorrow ends the day.”

We lingered where the pine trees lift their branches dark on high,
 A song of deep content they sing beneath the sunny sky;
 Their low continuous murmur falls upon the soul like balm.
 And tears and sorrow have no place within their solemn calm.
 But that dark shadow from your brow, no sound could drive away,
 “Our life is short, and all things die, in weeping ends the day.”

But soft from out the velvet grass, the dewdrops gleaming bright,
 An Easter lily, white and gold, stands queenly in the light;
 Its purity recalls sweet words of everlasting peace,
 Of One, who, dying long ago, bade all our sorrows cease:
 A smile like sunshine lights your face, its sadness flees away.
 “Though we must die, we live again, in glory ends the day.”

Publication. *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1894, signed Nora French; omitted from *Poems* (1910); collected in *The Outer Gate* (2009).

Provenance. The earliest surviving poem presently known; French was thirteen when it appeared. Text follows the 2009 recovery from the newspaper printing.

My Nook

Oh, 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 66. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Provenance. The 1910 notes identify this as a poem written when French was sixteen.

When Plaintively and Near the Cricket Sings

Now 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 68. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

The Little Memories

My 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 69. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Pass by

Mind 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 70. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

In Empty Courts

His 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 71. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Down the Trail

Break 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.

Publication. *Out West*, May 1904; substantially revised in *Poems* (1910), p. 72.

“Bells from over the Hills Sound Sweet.”

Russian Proverb.

Oh, 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 74. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

In Town

The 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 75. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Moods

I

Sweet 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 76. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

A Misty Morning

Low-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.

Publication. *Out West*, October 1903, as *Mist*; lightly revised and retitled in *Poems* (1910), p. 77.

Two Songs

You 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.

Publication. *Out West*, November 1903; collected with light punctuation changes in *Poems* (1910), p. 78.

Noon

The 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.

Publication. *Out West*, July 1905; collected with light punctuation changes in *Poems* (1910), p. 79.

Your Beautiful Passing

Across 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 80. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

By Moonlight

Is 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

Publication. *The Land of Sunshine*, April 1899; revised in *Poems* (1910), p. 81.

A Dream-Love

Ah, happier he who gains not
The love some seem to gain,
The joy that custom stains not
Shall still with him remain,
The loveliness that wanes not,
The love that ne'er can wane.

In dreams she grows not older,
The land of dreams among,
Though all the world wax colder,
Though all the songs be sung,
In dreams doth he behold her
Still fair and kind and young.

Publication. Unpublished before *The Outer Gate* (2009).

Provenance. Manuscript in The Bancroft Library, dated to late August 1906 by the 2009 editors.

One Day

The 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.

Publication. *Out West*, February 1904; collected with light typographic changes in *Poems* (1910), p. 82.

The Mission Graves

By 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.

Publication. *The Land of Sunshine*, January 1900; revised in *Poems* (1910), p. 83.

Along the Track

The 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.

Publication. *Out West*, March 1904; collected with light punctuation changes in *Poems* (1910), p. 84.

A Place of Dreams

Here 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 85. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Think Not, O Lillas

Think not, O Lillas, 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 86. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Provenance. The 1910 notes say French recalled the lines from a dream; Lafler retained them for what he called their singular beauty.

The Suicide

The sleepless night had been a whirl of aching memory and self-hatred, huge chaotic fancies and plunges in a clotted swamp where a lake had been laughter, fed by brooks of sanity. His body had fought for its life against his brain.

There was knowledge in his very flesh of effort and weariness, heat and cold, the brush of wet reeds, the shock of a wave, the bite of a hill wind. No glory of color, no softness of touch or sweetness of scent that the man's life had known but worked on its particular sense and cried out. His body was a whimpering Earth Giant that the dominating brain was bent on swinging into nothingness, as Hercules held Antaeus away from the touch of his mother until he died.

Curiously enough the man had no regret for his body. Detail by detail he planned its destruction. He loved his brain. Even as he used one deliberate thought tool after another, he laid each down caressingly. "All these will be broken," said his consciousness. "Something will live," argued the man. "But this will never have a head, or that arms."

Publication. Unpublished prose poem; first collected in *The Outer Gate* (2009).

Provenance. Manuscript in The Bancroft Library, probably written in early November 1907.

“*To Rosy Buds....*”

To 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 87. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Yesterday

Now 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 88. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Provenance. The 1910 notes identify *Yesterday* and *The Mourne* as French's last poems.

The Mourner

Because 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.

Publication. First collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 89. No earlier printing has been located in the sources consulted.

Provenance. The 1910 notes identify *Yesterday* and *The Mourner* as French's last poems.

Ave atque Vale

It 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.

Publication. Probably published posthumously in *Sunset*, December 1907; collected in *Poems* (1910), p. 90.

Provenance The 1910 notes say it was written about two years before French's death, despite its placement at the end of the volume.

At the End

Tremblingly and spent I ran and fell,
And ran again, a sorrow made me fleet.
For very fear its shape I could not tell—
 The briars tore my feet.

In broken flight across the cruel land,
So weary was I that I only smiled
When, swift and strong, a tender, mighty hand
 Upraised me like a child.

“It was not you I feared,” rejoiced, I cried,
(His touch had healed my hurts, no more they bled,)
“Life radiant, God has sent you to my side!”
 “Nay, I am Death!” he said.

Publication. Survives in a newspaper clipping dated June 16, 1910; omitted from *Poems* (1910); collected in *The Outer Gate* (2009).

Provenance. Manuscript in The Bancroft Library bears a penciled “1903,” possibly added by French’s sister Helen.

AFTERWORD

Publication, provenance, and the making of the text

A posthumous book

French left no book manuscript and no final table of contents. After her death, her sister Helen and father Edward entrusted papers to George Sterling. Sterling also held material left in Carmel, while Henry Anderson Lafler possessed the largest surviving cache of poems and letters sent to him for criticism between 1905 and 1907. These materials were pooled for *Poems* (1910). Lafler assumed formal editorial responsibility, Sterling helped choose and proof the poems, and Porter Garnett designed and hand-set the volume, which the Stanley-Taylor Company printed in an edition of five hundred copies under the Strange Company imprint.

The collaborators did not always agree. James Hopper warned Sterling that Lafler might “fix up” French’s lyrics and argued that Helen French Hunt’s judgment should control. The published volume itself thanks Sterling and Garnett for lightening Lafler’s work. Because the surviving record does not assign every change to a particular hand, this edition distinguishes observable variants from claims of authorship: a difference between a magazine text and the 1910 text is certain; who made it is not always certain.

The textual record

The fourteen Lummis printings are the strongest witnesses to French's early poems because each appeared during her lifetime under an editor who worked directly with her. The 1910 readings may embody her later revisions, posthumous copyediting, or both. The ten works recovered in 2009 have a mixed provenance: some come from lifetime periodicals, others from manuscripts at The Bancroft Library, and two survive in a newspaper clipping attached to Ina Coolbrith's copy of *Poems*. The publication and provenance notes beneath each title identify which kind of witness supplies the present text.

This is therefore a collected reading edition of the texts presently recovered, not a genetic edition of every draft. It preserves the early magazine states in their own section and the collected states in the main sequence, allowing substantial revisions to be read rather than silently collapsed. Punctuation-only differences are summarized below; the more consequential verbal changes are described explicitly.

Variants in the Lummis poems

By Moonlight The 1899 text has "the world I know," "neath amethystine sky," and a final line, "Through whispering willow boughs... I dream and dream." The 1910 text changes know to knew, substitutes "beneath a silver sky," regularizes several compounds, and omits the final line.

Summer Dusk / Dusk. Retitled for 1910. The revision is chiefly punctuation and typography, with "soft small rustlings" made singular and "parched" printed with a marked final syllable.

The Mission Graves The 1910 text changes "Father" to "Padre" and "One Saint's Day from an evening mass" to "On Saint's day, from an evening rite." Its final stanza is substantially recast: the dead are "far-called from voids of space" and guided by each taper's spark rather than drawn individually to their graves.

The Old Garden / The Garden of Dolores. Retitled for 1910, with punctuation and contractions regularized. The last line changes from "Her soul has called to thee... a last good-by" to "Her soul has called to thee ... a far goodbye."

Answered. The recovered later state changes "The morn crept in" to "The moon crept in" in the first two lines and makes light changes in capitalization and punctuation.

Mist / A Misty Morning. Retitled for 1910. Wording is essentially unchanged; punctuation, stanza grouping, and gray/grey vary.

Two Songs. Only light punctuation changes have been found.

One Day. The 1910 text changes “silver gray” to the hyphenated “silver-grey” and lightly revises punctuation.

Along the Track. Only light punctuation changes have been found.

Down the Trail. This is the largest revision among the Lummis poems. Six lines describing mist rising through pines are removed; “our little trail” becomes “the little trail”; several landscape phrases are recast; and the last stanza changes “A last clear pink, translucent as a pearl” to “A fading rose of sunset hanging low.”

By the Hospital. The wording is stable; punctuation is regularized.

Rain. The most consequential change replaces “Oh, passing words, a blue so dear!” with “To leaning grass in image clear,” changing the stanza from an apostrophe into a more continuous landscape image.

Noon. The wording is stable; punctuation is regularized.

The Constant Ones. The 1910 text changes “this sweet new quiet” to “the sweet new quiet” and lightly revises punctuation.

Known but unlocated poetry

One specifically titled poem known from the correspondence cannot presently be printed: *Remembered Faces*. Lafler compared an “old” and a “new” version, praising the new first and last quatrains but preferring the tenderness and first-person voice of the older second stanza. Neither complete state has been located, and the title does not occur in *Poems* (1910) or *The Outer Gate* (2009). The correspondence therefore proves that at least two drafts once existed but preserves only Lafler’s description, not enough of French’s language to reconstruct the poem.

The archive also records losses without titles. French often discarded drafts; family papers were destroyed or dispersed; and poems sent to editors or friends may remain unidentified in uncatalogued clippings and correspondence. No additional lost title can be asserted securely from the sources consulted for this edition. *The Diary of a Telephone Girl* and other known prose writings are excluded by genre, not treated as missing poems.

“Collected” here means all poem texts presently located and recoverable, together with an explicit record of the titled absence that can be documented.

Editorial limits

The publication notes are conservative. “No earlier printing has been located” is a report on the sources consulted, not proof that a poem never appeared elsewhere. Page references identify the 1910 first edition. Manuscript locations follow the 2009 editors and the Bancroft finding aids; future cataloguing may refine them. Where the 1910 notes report an occasion or composition date, the note is attributed to those editors rather than silently adopted as authorial fact.

Colophon

Publication and production notes

This critical reading edition was edited by Brian Kim Stefans for The Text-Tech Papers, Los Angeles, in 2026, as part of Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry.

The poems were reset from the source pages identified in the editorial record and datasheet. The book was composed in EB Garamond on a cream field at 6 × 9 inches. Its designed cover and selective archival opening follow the Julia Boynton Green production standard.