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To  
Muzicier Salomon Reinach  
in memory of faire times and more  
peaceful places.

Natalie Clifford Barney



APRIL.

THE CITY OF THE FLOWER.



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072993





To enter with the full moon, and alone,  
The town of pictures, poetry and stone  
-That strangers too familiarly call Florence -  
And shadow-like to pass her by unknown:  
Her passiveness may be a still abhorrence  
Of those who court, and yet shall never own  
Her tyrant angels Gods cannot dethrone.  
Indifferent to worship's undertone  
Indifferent to her indifference,  
To pass her by, untroubled by fine art:  
Why tell the loves of her reverted heart,  
Her loves with lingering angels in their name?  
-Though wings and lilies guard their pure increase  
Are pregnant virgins undefiled by fame?  
And that belated pagan race who came  
To rest on Christian tombs, are they at peace  
With mediaeval souls, these giants from Greece?

In vain fair youths, whose pageants never cease,  
And arrogant self made rulers ride apart  
Around the heights, where now the peasants cart  
Bears casks of oil and vintage to the mart  
Down in this hollow of the Apennines,  
Where forestieri fight with Florentines  
Over the price of flowers, fruits and wines.  
These things I apprehend but have not seen;  
To me, a traveller cloaked in twilight's green  
And silver, vanquishing the gold of day,  
To me, the hills seem far enough away.  
Yet all around me, like successive waves  
They undulate, and swell, and cristallise,  
Between their sloping crests my curved road lies.  
A gush of moonshine drowns the fields, engraves  
Its moving arabesques on garden walls  
(Rose and rosemary grow where the light falls.)  
I stop at one of these, most shy of mortals  
And hesitate before the open portals,  
The wandering sky-stream floods the arched facade  
Where blossoming trees and blossoming house await  
The gabelliere's nightly serenade  
Then, lover-like, I tiptoe through the gate.  
Anticipations, following you I come  
A stranger to the freshness of this home.  
Undrugged by habit, keen of eye and ear,  
No customary voice disturbs me here.  
I enter into silence well-ordained  
Where only future hours are contained

Hostess invisible, everywhere your touch  
Has left an outward sign of grace, in such  
A place was wondering Psyche led by Cupid.  
My wonderment though great shall prove less stupid -  
-Nearing the lamp that some Aladdin bears?  
I mount the magic ivy-clustered stairs,  
And close behind, my shape in darkness fares.  
The garden washed in moonlight, I resist  
Won by the artful glow a colourist  
Has gathered from the glint of gems, and shed  
So soft, a maiden-bride might here be kissed.  
From antichambers gloomed in amethyst  
I reach the rosy room a blush created  
Where girls to the mysterious gods are mated?  
Gods who awaked, on angry pinions fled.  
So, musingly, I glide into the bed  
And drop, from dream to dream, into the deep  
Imageless waters of a dreamless sleep.

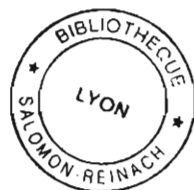
The heavy eyelids of the casements keep  
Midnight within, meantime the molten noon  
Pours down upon the roof, and flowers swoon  
With their own fragrance, as the sun rays creep  
Around the shutters, none shall open too soon.  
While day, illuminer of twilight tales,  
Becomes a fairy craftsman in details,  
At Beauty's service his crude palette pales.  
The bluest shadows on green walls are fed,  
Here, in the boudoir where Love bows his head  
Fearing alike, his mistress and the fates  
He counts the door's carved daisies while he waits.  
... Another door, acceding to the halls  
Patterns the light through wood cut intervals  
Revealing secrets, colours and designs  
Whose yet inviolate features one divines  
As ladies leaning to confessionals.  
Imprisoned morning' delicately matches  
Her tints on mirrors, where she sometimes catches  
In ancient frames a passing portraiture  
Of guests, discordant with the furniture.  
Ah! happy rooms resembling precious caskets,

Disclose your treasures as the breezes flit  
And fan reflections from boughs opposite.  
Upon the floor the sun-pools play near baskets  
Golden as they, some fairy thus reverses  
Her largest hat to tempt unfinished verses.  
While double petalled poppies drowse the brain,  
I rise and stretch myself towards the light  
What scenes has Nature fashioned for my sight?  
A different mountain in each window-pane  
Painted in mildest hues of discreet spring.  
One rose upon an arbour opening.  
At last Desire, attaining to Delight  
Speeds, hand in hand, each promise answering.  
Down in the court, called by the guttural cooing  
Of doves, I go, each dew-drenched flower wooing,  
My face buried in petals, then my lips  
Feed on the honeysuckles hollow tips,  
A blinking through the white emblazoned plots  
Of grass, I shun the dial's radiant hour  
And shut my eyes on multicoloured spots.  
Shall the housed lemon groves become my bower  
Their cooling growth confined in giant pots  
Awaits, while they submit to rural reason  
Pansies in velvet dresses out of season  
Like wry-faced matrons disapprove of beds  
More newly made, where phlox the wall-flower weds.  
The trellis like a ladder leads the vine  
Close to the casements clinging: its desire is  
To court on high the full blown eglantine.

Ah! might I write in blood of purple iris  
That stains my hands, with sensuous ease recline,  
My elbows deep in clover crops a'dapple  
With shifting shades beneath the blossoming apple  
That pelts the gardener, filling up the chapel  
With empty flasks of chianti, while his salads  
Stretch out their lines, unkenpt as olden ballads,  
- Of marigolds and wild anemones -  
To reach the fields, I pick my way through these.  
Fixed deep to earth with clouds for canopies  
Accomplished by slow time, the cypress trees  
- Resembling spires or night-hewn colonnades -  
Repeat their rows in long triangled shades,  
And guard the gnarled and stunted olive boughs  
With tender two-toned leaves set quivering  
On air displaced as by a seraph's wing.  
I pause near furrows fresh from oxen ploughs,  
On soil of which those rounded hills are made,  
That mountain measures equal to the blade.  
Of grass I nibble as I hasten on.  
Through narrow walls, the delved canal like roads  
Pass with the living, to the hushed abodes  
Once eloquent with the Decameron.  
Most ignorant of facts that others know  
Heedless of where the "Seven circles" shone  
Whether this be Fiesole? Settignano?  
That distant gleaming strip the river Arno?  
Have these my thoughts in whispered utterance?  
Full of Life's everchanging countenance



Their sacred names my impious mind eludes,  
My untraced path's aloof from cultured broods  
Of pilgrims to conservative romance.  
Though sighing phantoms haunt this atmosphere  
Yet unions with the past are desolate  
Our time is NOW, our poetry is HERE  
Taking the Present for my joyful mate,  
I have no care for those strange companies  
That haunt men's souls, and if I bend my knees  
It is to worship things ephemeral  
My life has answered many a broken call  
Rejoiced and sorrowed, often gone astray  
- Only myself, myself can re-create.  
Attending Idleness while others pray,  
Fear, reproduce, compete, regret, gainsay,  
I gather to my heart this perfect day  
And run, with all my happy blood a'beating  
Towards to-night as to a lover's meeting.



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