

Eva Colombo, *Flowers and Sea*, fourth chapter: *Oleander* (Inspired by Frederic Leighton's painting *Flaming June*)

You cannot touch the oleander. You cannot reach the sea. You cannot look at the sun. And yet you need to draw near to the oleander that juts out into the fence within which you are locked up. That oleander recalls to you a road which goes to the sea, recalls to you that when the sun sets the sea on fire and the sky looks like a forge's vault and the seawater is melted gold ready to change itself into the tiara which you will wear during a feast – day that sooner or later will come... you need to be there, on the sea – shore. You need to be there and to see with closed eyes an orange veil which throbs to the rhythm of your heart... the dress which you will wear during a feast – day that sooner or later will come. That day you will be free at last, free to be yourself and you will dance on the sea – shore following the rhythm of your heart and the waves would not wipe out your footprints. That day you will be free at last, free to sing your truth and the rays of the sun would embroider the words of your chant on a flag which would never be lowered. Do not hurt yourself against the bars of the fence within which you are locked up. Sit down beside the oleander, close your eyes. Do not be afraid, the oleander watches over you. You are not at a loss, the oleander shows you the way. It is a flower that knows how to defend itself and how to withstand. It cannot be easily picked like something that happens to be at hand, it cannot be easily thrown away like something of unappreciated value. Appalling disasters are unable to eradicate its roots: it will flower again, it will flower over and over again by the side of the road which goes to the sea. Do not deem the fence within which you are locked up worthy of a glance. Sit down beside the oleander, close your eyes and turn towards the sun. You will see an orange veil which throbs to the rhythm of your heart... and then you will see me wrapped up into that orange veil, fallen asleep beside an oleander by the sea. I'm dreaming that feast – day that sooner or later will come. That day you will be free at last, sister: free to be

yourself, free to sing your truth. I will give you a tiara which will be like the sun when it gilds the sea and the features of your face would be like an horizon that cannot be neglected. I will give you a dress of orange veil which will be like the sun when you look at it with closed eyes and you know that there isn't a fence capable of preventing sunlight from throbbing to the rhythm of your heart. That day we will dance together on the sea – shore and the waves would not wipe out our footprints, and the oleander leaves would carry the echo of our chant as far as the memory can reach... Sit down beside the oleander, close your eyes. Do not be afraid: the oleander watches over you.