

Eva Colombo, *Three portraits of the Teacher*, second chapter: *The Spring*

I recall the first time I've seen the Spring portrayed by Franz Von Stuck, in Budapest, many years ago. It was one of those days in which the sky was so clear that I was able to look at myself in it as if it had been a mirror: I wore a blue dress, my knees were tanned and the sun's light turned my hair into a sparkling purple veil. In a word: it was one of those days in which a twenty – year - old girl should have to feel at ease. And yet I didn't feel at ease: the rope – soles of my espadrillas prevented me from feeling at ease. They didn't hurt me, not at all. But the rustic ingenuousness of those soles made an annoying dissonance while I was walking. Yes, that day I felt as I was walking on a thread, a sparkling thread suspended upon the shadow. Each step required a sophisticated precision that it would have been foolish to expect from a pair of coarse espadrillas. At each step I wished to hurl them at that too much clear mirror of the sky, at that sky which kept on distracting me by tickling my vanity. I had to concentrate, I couldn't allow myself a false step. The sun made the purple veil of my hair so much sparkling that my eyes were dazzled: bare feet would have lead my steps far better than my eyes did. Well, I should really have hurled my espadrillas at the sky that day. But of course I couldn't, I was in the heart of Budapest. Inside the Museum of Fine Arts the sun granted me a truce: then I was able to see clearly that the sparkling thread on which I was tottering with those pair of incongruous espadrillas was created by the fear I felt of the judgment, the judgment that the boy with whom I was could have been able to hurl at me at each step. I feared the sharp glance and the blunt voice of that boy, I feared that his judgment would push me over the sparkling thread, down into the shadow. And suddenly I saw her, the Spring portrayed by Franz Von Stuck. She was silhouetted against a cloudy sky which was as the sheet that you put on your head in making the desperate attempt to extend the night, in making the desperate attempt to continue concealing yourself. She was into the shadow, so beautiful and so alone. It seemed

that she wouldn't feel the need of the sun and of a companion: her blue eyes were her serene sky, and she wouldn't feel the need of mirrors to be aware of her own beauty. Her hair didn't dazzle her eyes: her hair was that veil of shadow that is often necessary for being able to see clearly. Her hands weren't looking for the warmth of other hands but they were pleased with the fresh touch of a bunch of violets: the violets that flourish in the shadow, the violets that don't feel the need of anyone's glance to be living and beautiful. The rustic rope – soles of my espadrillas matched perfectly with the dark and fertile soil that my feet firmly trod while I was gazing at that painting. That one was the Spring: one of the most loved symbol of life and beauty. And yet she was alone, and yet she was into the shadow. It is possible to be living and beautiful even alone, even into the shadow. When I left the Spring portrayed by Franz Von Stuck my steps were those of a person who is no longer scared by the eventuality of falling.