

Eva Colombo, *Means of escape*, fifth chapter: *The roses and the new dress*

You're sleeping, you're not dead. I'm sure of this, you can't die. In Jan Toorop's painting *The vagabonds* you're sleeping under a willow. At the evening twilight the sky was a dim glimmer under a cope of black clouds: it was going to rain and you sheltered yourself under that willow, you sat on the moss. The moss was so tender and the lullaby of the willow's leafy branches so sweet that you fell asleep. The moss was so green and the willow so luxuriant that you didn't realize you was falling asleep in a graveyard. At nightfall the vagabonds gone out of their graves since they were unable to stand anymore the stench of their dead souls. During the day they don't pay attention to that stench, they have something else in mind: making money over money. But at night their dead souls torment them forcing them to crawl out of the graves and to rove seeking the soul of someone else, to rove trying to buy or to steal the soul of someone else. Now they've notice you asleep there, right in the middle of their graveyard and they crave for your soul. But a woman watches over you: she wears a cope black as the clouds but under that cope glimmers a dress candid as the dawn's light after a rainy night. She gazes at the vagabonds with her huge dark eyes so that into the abyss of her eyes the horror shall fall and die. She has placed on your hair a wonderful red thorn – less rose so that its scent should prevent the stench of the vagabonds dead souls from poisoning you. She has placed on your blue dress some white roses with long thorny stems: what has the power of revivifying the soul costs sacrifice and the vagabonds are used to regard at sacrifice as something worthless, they wouldn't let those thorns wound their hands. They tear to shreds your blue dress but the thorns of the white roses prevent their rapacious hands from seizing your soul. At the morning twilight the vagabonds will go back to their graves and the woman who watches over you will dress you with a dress made of the same material of her own dress, the touch of her tapering fingers will be so delicate that it will not rouse you. At dawn the woman who has

watched over you will fade into the candid light and you will wake up wearing a lovely new dress, a candid dress with black sleeves. But you won't pay attention to your new candid dress since you won't remember your blue dress of the evening before, you won't remember anything. You will only know that you have to resume your path. You will be about to go up a stairway when a scent will attract your attention. Yes, it will happen exactly as in that Waterhouse's painting, *The shrine*. The scent will come from a shrine on the edge of the path, a shrine built to honour someone who has been made sacred by sacrifice. But you will pay attention only to some roses in some small blue vases, blue as that dress of yours which has been torn by the vagabonds. But you won't remember that blue dress, you won't remember anything. You will bend over the roses and you will know only that you love their scent, you will know only that you are alive. You will resume your path and you will go up the stairway looking at the glimmer of the sky through the trees. And your black sleeves will be as the black branches of a willow during a rainy night, and your candid dress will be as the dawn's light after a rainy night.