

Eva Colombo, *Three portraits of the Teacher*, third chapter: *The virgin*

All night long I had envied the snow. In the reflection of the window – pane my eyes were getting more and more black and the snow more and more white, my face was getting more and more tired and the snow more and more fresh. Against the cold window – pane my chapped hands bled, my darkened eyes shed tears. The snow didn't feel the cold, she wasn't tired. Light as a feather she scratched the lead of the night, lightly she turned the slime of the street into platinum. I wondered how a sky so dark and heavy could shed snow – flakes so light, so immaculate white. My eyes were black and heavy as the leaden sky but the tears I was shedding were black: black because of the kajal, black because of the disillusion. In the mirror of my window the snow was whirling, she was weaving again the illusion that life could be light and white as she is. The dawn was wiping out the reflection of my face from the window – pane: I smiled at my fading gloom, I smiled at a dawning light and white world. That day in Prague the sun caused the snow to shine as platinum without melting her: on that snow I didn't leave any foot – print: it was as if I were dancing lightly upon her. Even the black of my eyes in the reflection of the shop – windows seemed to burn with a cheerful crackling, even the amber pendant which I had bought seemed to shine as the eyes of a person who knows that tears could be caused by joy as well. But with the dark the sky became again a leaden sky, my eyes were afraid of looking at it for fear of revealing themselves similar to it. Another night was coming: another night during which the black of my eyes in the reflection of the window – pane would have been as the black of the most atrocious disillusion. I looked at the platinum – snow on the street: so pure, so unchangeable...I started again to envy her. She didn't seem to fear the leaden sky, her adamantine purity wasn't scared by the night. Now on that snow I didn't dance any more, I sneaked away on tiptoe with the hope that she wouldn't find out my impudence: I dared to graze her whiteness with my eyes dim with kajal – black tears. It wasn't snowing

yet, there wasn't wind: everything was still. And yet a growing tension was given off the opposed polarities of the leaden sky and the platinum ground, it was as if they were collecting all their strength for jumping at each other's throat. I thought It was better not to find myself in the middle: the National Gallery was my way out. I bumped against *The virgin* portrayed by Gustav Klimt, I was forced to stop against her shut eyes. She was whirling just like one of those snow – flakes that at dawn in the mirror of my window wove again the illusion of a beautiful life. Her hands didn't bleed, they didn't suffer from the cold that I feel when I've got the sensation that everything is actually nothing. Her eyes didn't shed tears, they didn't suffer from the tiredness that I feel when I gaze at something that is fading away. Her hands were open, ready to receive everything even if this everything could prove itself to be actually nothing. Her eyes were shut, ready to open for enjoying the changeable reflection of themselves in thousand changing mirrors. When I left the National Gallery it wasn't snowing yet but the tension was diluted into a light rustle. Soon the leaden sky and the platinum ground would merge in the whirling of the snow and the black of my eyes in the reflection of the window – pane would be as the black of the leaden sky which bears the whiteness of the snow, as the black of the night which bears the shininess of the day.